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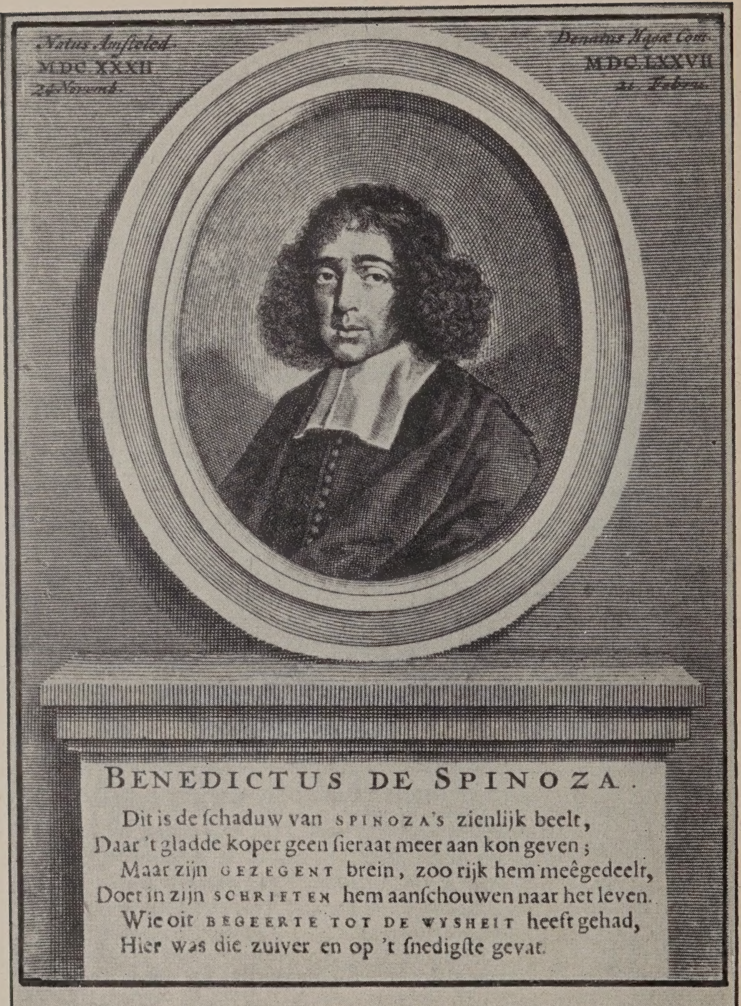
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MDC.LXXVII
21. Febru.

BENEDICTUS DE SPINOZA.

Dit is de ſchaduw van SPINOZA's zienlijk beelt,
Daar 't gladde koper geen ſieraat meer aan kon geven;
Maar zijn GEZEGENT brein, zoo rijk hem meêgedeelt,
Doet in zijn SCHRIFTEN hem aanſchouwen naar het leven.
Wie oit BEGEERTE TOT DE WYSHEIT heeft gehad,
Hier was die zuiver en op 't ſnedigſte gevat.

SPINOZA

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BLESSÉD
SPINOZA
A BIOGRAPHY OF THE PHILOSOPHER

BY LEWIS BROWNE
AUTHOR OF "THAT MAN HEINE," ETC.

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK
1932

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By LEWIS BROWNE

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ONCE MORE

TO MY BELOVED,

MYNA

"I shall observe by the bye, that the Barber of Spinoza *brought in after his Death, a Bill exprest in these words:* 'Mr. Spinosa, of Blessed Memory . . . ;' *two Ironmongers, and the Mercer, who furnished the Mourning Gloves, made him the same Complement in their Bills. . . . If they had known what were the Principles of* Spinoza *in point of Religion, 'tis likely they would not have made use of the word* Blessed." . . .

COLERUS.

PREFACE

THERE are those of the great to whom glory comes like an accolade of thunder: strenuous beings who with brandished fists and roaring throats force the very heavens to sing their praise. But there are others no less great to whom glory comes like the dawn-wind, and of them it is less easy to write. There may be drama in their lives, but it is for the most part inward; there may be glamor, but it is largely veiled. And therefore the biographers pass them by. For example, Baruch de Spinoza: of commentaries on his thought there are scores and hundreds, but of accounts of his life there are exceedingly few. Clearly enough, the career of that outcast philosopher has had little appeal for the tellers of tales. It contained too little of physical storm to lend itself to dramatic writing, too little of blood and bluster and tears. It might have contained more, much more; for Spinoza's times encouraged such extravagances. But the man himself did not. He was excommunicated in his youth, and hounded from the world in which he had been reared; his company was shunned, his writings were proscribed, his very life was menaced. Yet, with a supernal aloofness, he rarely troubled to fight back. "The wise man," he once declared, "being conscious of a certain eternal necessity in whatever exists or occurs, is scarcely ever disturbed in his mind." And Spinoza was supremely a wise man.

And just that, from the point of view of the biographer, was perhaps Spinoza's sorriest failing. There was no recklessness in the man, no eagerness to fling himself on those who harried him, no readiness to go down in a gory brawl. Not that he was dead to such all-too-human impulses. On the contrary, they surged in him throughout his life, and with such urgency that once and again he was compelled to give vent to them. But, save for those extremely rare lapses, he was able to rein them in. He made his mind the sovereign of his being, and by dint of intellect so restrained his passions as to rid his life almost completely of that element of conflict which is the warp and woof of drama.

And perhaps that is why so little heed has ever been paid to Spinoza as a man. Lessing, Goethe, Shelley, Coleridge—they were all profoundly stirred by his thought; but not one of them ever wrote of his life. Byron once talked of doing so; but nothing came of his words. Likely enough he decided the man's life was too virtuous to deserve recounting. "It is perhaps as difficult to write a good life," says Lytton Strachey, "as to live one." True. But to write a good life of a man who himself lived one—that is perhaps impossible.

Yet, impossible, as it may be, the task is worth essaying. Biographical literature, especially in these latter days, positively crawls with eccentrics, monsters, fools, and blatherskites. But rare is the life-story of a good man. And therefore the biography of such a one as Spinoza is peculiarly deserving to be retold. Here is a man who was indisputably good. Even his pious contemporaries had to concede that to him. They considered his ideas pernicious and abominable, and his books the sinkholes of Satan's own lies. Yet his conduct, they were forced to admit, was exemplary. His unflagging love of the contemplative life, his utter disinterestedness in fame or fortune, his fortitude in the face of wasting disease, his patience under relentless persecution, his sweetness, gentility, and superlative tolerance—these were virtues which none could deny in him. Not until centuries later did his romantic admirers begin to describe him as the "holy outcast" and the "God-intoxicated man." But even at the time of his death his barber already spoke of him as "Mr. Spinoza of blessed memory."

Yes, he was a good man. But that is not all. In addition he was a wise man—one of the wisest that ever lived. And it is this combination that makes Spinoza's life shine out like a lamp in the dark that cloaks our world. He was no saint by the grace of God; he was a good man by virtue of deliberate reasoning. It was no dread of Hell or dream of Heaven that kept him from wickedness; he drew upon no other-worldly faith for strength to withstand fate's bludgeonings. He was a realist, his eyes never closed like a child's when wishing, but wide open and aware of the actual.

And therefore, being under no delusions, Spinoza could be good without impassioned straining. There was nothing of the ascetic in him, nothing of the embittered no-sayer who says no only because he fears to say yes. If he denied himself pleasant luxuries, and even common comforts, it was not because he saw a virtue in denial. Rather it was because his absorption in the quest for truth made him indifferent to all vanities. "It is superstition," he taught, "that sets up sadness as good, and all that tends to joy as evil. . . . Yes, it is the part of a wise man to use the things of this life, and enjoy them to the full."

That is why one finds in his writings no trace of those repressions which rise from the mouths of the conventional saints like stench from hidden carrion. The man was integrated, never lunging frenziedly to lay hold of some abstinence, and then falling back in hysterical despair. He was secure in goodness, serene in his joy of life—because he let reason guide his steps. "Whatever accords with reason," he wrote, "is in my belief most conducive to the practice of virtue." And in his own life that belief was completely validated.

There are those who say that he carried reason too far—that he thought with such excessive acuteness and inexorable logic as to devour and absorb the very objects of thought. They say that he reduced all life to nullity; that the "ultimate truth" discovered by his relentless rationalism is but an empty equation made up of a God who is nothing and a world that is less than nothing. . . . But the fact remains that he who cleaved to such rationalism was himself a happy man. And that fact, demonstrated as clearly in his life as in his words, is the final refutation of the carping of mysticists.

Many volumes have been written on Spinoza's philosophy; and, in this year which marks the tercentenary of his birth, many more such volumes are being written. That is good, for his philosophy is all too little known in the world, and even less understood. But it would be good also if his life were better known, for it is the most convincing demonstration of the soundness of his philosophy. These are days when men are once more learning to doubt the saving power of reason. But here was a life ruled completely by reason—and who shall say it was not saved?

Santa Monica,
August 7, '32.

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BOOK ONE

IN THE JODENBUURT

The better we know the spirit and character of a man, the more easily can we understand his words. . . .

"TREATISE ON THEOLOGY & POLITICS."

CHAPTER I

THE Espinozas must have come originally from Spain, where the name still adheres to certain villages in the north. It was, incidentally, a cruelly apposite name for the family, for it means "thorny" and those who bore it were Jews. That appositeness, however, must have been accidental, for when the name was first adopted, the Jews in Spain may have still enjoyed comparative freedom. They possessed wealth, power, and great learning; they were viziers and court scholars and proud husbandmen tilling their own soil. Even during the twilight of that day, when the Moors had begun to give ground and Spain was becoming a Catholic country once more, the Jews had still found life tolerable there. Moslems and Christians had both stood in need of them in the contest they were then engaged in, and the Jews had been able to turn this way or that, according to which side showed them more favor. They provisioned the armies, spied behind the lines, fought in the battles—and set their own price. It is recorded that in the eleventh century Alfonso VI, the conqueror of Toledo, was actually compelled to postpone a battle until after the Sabbath was passed in order not to offend the many Jews in his host!

But once the contest drew to a close, the Jews were reft of their advantage. The Christians, having no further need of their help, turned on them then with a hate the more intense because it had been so long repressed. Mobs attacked them in the towns, pillaging their houses and ravishing their wives. Jews were arrested on all sorts of pretexts, fined, and dispossessed. Finally in 1492, when almost all of Spain had become united under Ferdinand and Isabella, the Jews were summarily told to leave. Only one way was left them of escaping the order, and that was through the door of the Church. If they would abjure their ancestral faith and turn Christian, they might remain in the land unmolested; if they refused, they must go.

The order was cruel and beyond defense, yet for all that quite accountable. The Spanish had struggled for seven hundred years to drive the Moslems out of Spain, and during all that time their religious faith alone had kept their will from flagging. And now that they were triumphant at last, their faith was turned to frenzy. The savage zeal with which they had fought their holy war was carried over into the ensuing peace. It was not enough for the victors that Islam had been routed; they were determined to stamp out Judaism as well. For this country they had just reconquered had to be Christian now completely. Christ had delivered it into their hands, and in Christ's name they had taken it. Therefore they could show no tolerance to such as still denied Christ's power.

But the barbed superstition which goaded the Christians to such fanaticism was no less imbedded in the Jews. If the Christians were ready to kill for one religion, the Jews were as ready to die for another. Confronted with the alternatives of conversion or flight, there were literally hundreds of thousands of Jews who showed signs of choosing the latter. It was no easy choice to make. These Jews belonged in Spain; had belonged in it for sixteen hundred years or more. Before ever there were Catholics in the land, or Moors, or even Visigoths, they had already been established here. And to have to leave it now, to have to tear themselves away and surrender all that their blood had contributed to the land, was almost beyond bearing. It had been evil enough when their brethren had been expelled from England in the thirteenth century, and from France in the fourteenth; but in both those instances the fugitives had at least been allowed to take their wealth with them. Here and now in Spain, however, it was even worse, for the decree of expulsion included the order that all who fled must leave their gold behind!

And yet they did flee. Not all of them, of course. The thousands who were unequal to the sacrifice gave in; but the rest, some three hundred thousand in all, remained steadfast. The reasons for this steadfastness were curiously mixed. In part they were motivated by sheer obstinacy. These Jews stemmed from the "stiff-necked" race, and their will-to-live was monstrous. In part, too, they were motivated by superstition. They firmly believed—even the most learned among them—that were they to yield and accept baptism, some dreadful supernatural evil would befall them. "Ceremonies have nothing to do with the attainment of blessedness," wrote the greatest of their progeny; but that was six generations later, and even then the notion was thought preposterous. To these Jews of the late fifteenth century, ceremonies were cardinal. A magic potency was thought to inhere in them; they were believed to be not mere symbols, but things that *worked*. And that was what moved many of those Jews to flee rather than apostatize: they were too afraid of their jealous God to do otherwise.

Nor were stubbornness and superstition the only factors in the matter; common sense, too, seemed to counsel flight. For the Jews had discovered that apostacy was no real alternative. At most it could win them a respite from persecution—but no more than that. Countless Jews running foul of mob attacks, or yielding to court pressure, had entered the Church during the preceding century; but it had availed them exceedingly little. Despite that they were ostensibly no longer Jews, they were still far from being real Christians. At most they were "new" Christians—and the qualifying word was an epithet. The erstwhile Jews were still discriminated against by town-counsels, and still assaulted by the mobs, for the brand of their ancestry had not been washed away by the holy water. All the complaints that had been made against them before their conversion were still made against them now—that they were avaricious, unscrupulous, treacherous, and detestable. Only one charge, infidelism, was spared them; but the lack was more than compensated for by the worse charge of heresy. For it was an open secret that most of these New Christians were not reconciled to the faith that had been thrust upon them. They were accused—and not without reason—of being *Maranos:* false and faithless Christians who clandestinely continued to live as Jews.

That was why the Spanish Inquisition had been set up a few years earlier. Heresy had become so flagrant in the land after the influx of the Jewish and Moslem converts, that Ferdinand and Isabella had felt it necessary to establish a special court to deal with the crime. And that court, directed as it was by Dominicans of almost pathological zeal, made life for the New Christians a nightmare. All that was needed was for a disgruntled servant or a hostile neighbor to accuse one of spreading clean table-linen on the Sabbath, and a warrant for arrest was inevitable. The prisoner, his guilt already established by the mere accusation, would be questioned, frequently with the aid of the rack. And, if he could not prove his innocence, the penalty was death. A man of great wealth and influence could sometimes move the pope to adjure the king to order the inquisitors to relent a little. His life would be spared then—though usually at the price of public humiliation and the confiscation of all his wealth. If he was an ordinary man, however, he had to pay the full penalty. In the presence of the court and a jeering multitude he would be made the object of an *auto-da-fé,* an "act of faith." First he would be preached to exhaustively. And then he would be put to death "with the utmost compassion and without the shedding of blood"—that is, by being burnt at the stake.

It was, therefore, dread of the inquisitors as much as of Jehovah's wrath that prompted so many Jews to decide on flight in 1492. What else was there for them to do? No matter how much holy water they might take, or how much swine's flesh they might gorge, there was for them no evading the hostility of the Christians. The only choice they had was between being turned out now or found out later—which was no choice at all. So, brought to bay, these Jews became filled with the courage of despair. "If they will let us live," they cried, "then we shall live; if they kill us, then shall we die. But we will not desecrate the covenant of our God!"

And thus was initiated one of the most harrowing migrations in all the history of mankind. When August 2d, the final day of leave-taking, arrived, half the roads in Spain were thronged with the fugitives. The summer sun beat down on them malevolently; the biting yellow dust hung like a cloud about their heads. Yet they dared not halt. They passed white-walled towns which they had helped to build, and leafy vineyards which they themselves had planted. They passed inns where they had once been greeted like lordlings, and market-places where they had been fawned on and feared. But now they had to slink by those places, or run because of the missiles and jeers. Gone was their erstwhile might and pride; now they were outlaws hounded from the land. They travelled for the most part on foot, their salvaged belongings piled high on little donkeys, or else loaded on their own bent backs. The little ones clung to the skirts of their mothers; the aged, the halt, the blind, stumbled along in the train. And thus they fled away, thousands and thousands of them, on that summer's day in 1492.

Certain of the leaders, thinking to give heart to the people, caused pipers and drummers to go before their companies. But it was in vain. The hapless fugitives gave no heed even to the savage sun upon their heads, or to the dust that gathered in their mouths. Sodden with anguish, they were dead to all external things. They simply plodded along, heads bowed, eyes vacant, limbs dragging tremblingly. For they were being driven from their homeplace. They were going away—never to return. . . .

No one knows how the Espinozas fared on that evil day in 1492. When we first hear of them, more than a hundred years later, some give their place of origin as Portugal; and that lends plausibility to the conjecture that certain members of the family were numbered with those who fled from Spain. We know that the majority of the fugitives at that time made for Portugal—it was the country nearest and most akin to Spain—and the Espinozas may well have been among them. And if they were, then the tale of their woes was but begun in 1492. As it turned out, worse tribulations befell the refugees in Portugal than had been even threatened in Spain. In the first place, each of them was forced to part with eight gold cruzados of what little money they had been able to smuggle out with them; those unable to pay the tax were ordered to move on. In the second place, a plague broke out in the towns where they were concentrated—it was August, and the heat coupled with their crowding and distress had made pestilence inevitable—and they began to die by the thousands. In the third place, the native population would not tolerate them. Only the wavering support of the king, who realized how useful these Jews might be to him, saved them from being deported at once.

Five years later, however, a new king sat on Portugal's throne, and then the refugees were left friendless. This king, the great Emanuel I, was well aware of the value of the Jews, and was most eager to employ them in his schemes for the building of a great Portuguese empire; but his young wife was a daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, and her hate of all infidels was monstrous. Even before their marriage, when Emanuel was still awaiting his bride, he had received a letter from her saying she would not even enter his land unless he promised to purge it of the Jews. The condition was actually written into the marriage-contract, and the young woman gave the monarch no peace until he carried it out. And thus it came about that on the 24th of December, 1496, the vicious folly committed by Spain was re-enacted in Portugal. All the Jews, native as well as immigrant, were ordered to turn Christian or leave.

But this time they did not leave. It was not that their strength failed them: they were given no chance to leave. The king, being shrewder than his faith-crazed wife, realized that his country could not afford to lose the Jews. With their initiative, their industry, and their astuteness, they were like a leaven in the population. Besides, their widely ramified family connections, their knowledge of foreign tongues, and their financial acumen, made them indispensable to the growth of his empire. So when the king saw that most of them were making ready to quit his domain, he sought ways of restraining them. First he gave out secret orders that all the children of the Jews be taken by force and baptized, for he thought that thus the adults might be constrained to yield. But the order, though carried out relentlessly, did not accomplish its ultimate purpose. The chronicles record that the Jewish mothers, "howling like bitches whose whelps were being torn from them," tried to smother their little ones rather than surrender them to the priests, or actually threw them into wells and then destroyed themselves. "Many had to be dragged to the font by their hair," relates Bishop Coutinho, who was a horrified eye-witness, "and fathers, clad in mourning and with ashes on their heads, accompanied their children to the very altars to protest against the inhuman baptism." . . . The approach of the final day set for the expulsion saw an undiminished host of adult Jews still determined to go.

But thereupon the king played his trump card. He let it be known that all Jews who intended to leave must assemble in Lisbon; and, once he had them all together there, he put so many hindrances in the way of their embarkation, that some twenty thousand were still left on land when the last moment for their departure had elapsed. That automatically rendered them outlaws, and the king, having penned them in "like oxen in stalls," gave them to understand that they were now at his mercy. First he tried by pious exhortations to make them submit to baptism. Then he put them on bread and water for three days. Finally he resorted to frank violence. Soldiers were sent into the prison and told to drive the stiff-necked infidels to the churches—to drag them there by the hair, or the beard, if need be. And therewith, having at last accomplished his will, the energetic young ruler heaved a sigh and ordered a loud Te Deum.

If there were Espinozas in Portugal in the year 1497—as seems altogether probable—they must have suffered the fate of the rest of the Jews in that land. They were made to receive the holy water and left to live out the rest of their lives as Maranos. For Marano, that is clandestine Jew, came to be the epithet so commonly applied to them that the king had to promulgate a law against the practice. Emanuel, having lived up to the letter of his promise to his wife, felt he had done enough. Were not all his Jews professing Christianity now? Why, then, should they continue to be badgered?

With the king on their side, life for the involuntary converts was not as bad as it might have been. Outwardly they made show of the most scrupulous Christian piety, but covertly they still continued to worship as Jews. A special decree permitting the baptized physicians to continue to make use of their Hebrew reference books made it possible for the Maranos to preserve all of their ancestral writings. For how many Christians in Portugal in those days could distinguish a book of medicine from any other work in the Hebrew language? And thus it came about that the study of rabbinic lore, though hardly able to flourish, did at least survive. Fathers taught their sons how to pray in the Holy Tongue, and mothers showed their daughters how to keep the Mosaic diet. In some centers there were even hidden synagogues. But it was a tortured life at best. Many of the Maranos grew rich, and some acquired grand titles. They became court-financiers and tax-gatherers; they sent their sons into the Church and bought them the most desirable benefices. But they suffered nevertheless. For one thing, they were troubled because of the difficulty in instructing their children. If they began to teach them the secret faith when they were infants, there was danger that they might prattle; if they left it till the children were already grown, there was danger that it might be too late. (It was not unknown for children reared without any inkling as to their real ancestral faith to recoil in horror and inform against *their own parents* when the secret was revealed to them!) For another thing, the Maranos were plagued by the ceaseless surreption in their lives. Their hypocrisy was like a foul vapor reeking in their own nostrils. Their whole life was a lie, and the dissimulation and collusion which it entailed made mere existence a torment.

And the worst of it was that it was so futile a lie, for though it earned them equality in the eyes of the law, it made them only the more despicable among men. To a large degree they were ostracized by the other Christians—as are their inbred and impoverished descendants who survive to this day in sequestered corners of Portugal. Worse still, they were often attacked by mobs. The populace could not forgive them that they were "Christãos Novos," and hardly a season passed without some demonstration against them. On one occasion—it was at the time of the famine and pestilence in 1506—the rabble of Lisbon actually sacked the Marano quarter and massacred no less than two thousand of the group.

The usual excuse for such outrages was the charge that the New Christians were still covertly Jews. But that was no more than the excuse. To this day there are descendants of Maranos dwelling in little known colonies in Portugal and Majorca, and, ironically enough, though they are now the most devout of Catholics, they are still ostracized. The discrimination now obviously has its origin in racial rather than a religious prejudice —and that must also have been the case four hundred years ago. Evidently the older Christians felt then about the converts as they still do about the descendants of those converts—that no matter what the quality of their conversion, they were still aliens. The Christãos Novos might tell their beads till their fingers grew numb, and recite Paternosters till they were hoarse; but they were still as foreign in the land as they had ever been. With their peculiar traits and detestable talents they simply did not "belong." And therein lay the root reason for the hostility of the Portuguese to the Maranos. Being still largely a primitive folk, the natives could not abide the least trace of variety. They were not content, therefore, to see the Jews baptized. They wanted to see them destroyed.

So long, however, as they had an ally in the king, the lot of the Maranos remained relatively endurable. If priests inflamed the populace against them, or master-craftsmen discriminated against them in the guilds, or town-councils sought to segregate them, they could at least lodge complaints before the throne. Not until after 1521, when a new ruler, James III, was crowned, did the Maranos taste the bitterest dregs. This new king was a son of that Spanish infanta who had brought all the afflictions to the Jews of Portugal in 1496, and fanaticism was bred in his very bones. Having been assured by his spies that the New Christians were indeed acting treasonably toward the Church, he set up an Inquisition like that of Spain to ferret out the sinners and destroy them. And therewith the last gleam of light was blotted out for the Maranos. Even those who had tried to be sincere in their profession of Christianity were now plunged into despair. For the Inquisition was a frantic instrument: it was ready to destroy a hundred innocent men rather than let one sinner escape. As an assembly of cardinals reported to Rome, after investigating the Portuguese Inquisition:

> "When a false-Christian is denounced—often by perjured witnesses—the inquisitors drag him to a dungeon where he is allowed no sight of heaven or earth, or of friends who might come to his aid. They accuse him on obscure testimony, informing him neither of the time nor the place where he committed the offence for which he was denounced. . . . The prisoners are racked by every instrument of torture in order to force from them confessions of their guilt. . . . And even if they are able to hold out, and succeed in clearly proving their innocence, they are nevertheless condemned to pay a fine so that it cannot be charged that they were arrested without cause. . . ."

Such was the holy court established in 1531 to purge Portugal of heresy. As in Spain, not a one of the New Christians but went about in hourly dread of its malevolence. It was not enough for them to observe the Christian rites with a scrupulousness no Old Christian thought necessary. They had to be just as careful not to observe —even unintentionally—any Jewish rites. They dared not buy their meat from another New Christian lest they be suspected of adhering to the Mosaic diet. They dared not have lighted candles in the house on Friday night, or turn the face of a dead man toward the wall, or avoid eating ordinary bread at Easter time. If a number of them gathered in one place, they left the door open lest they be suspected of holding services. If one of them found stray Hebrew records in an old chest, he destroyed them lest they be mistaken for fragments of a prayer-book. Day and night they had to be vigilant, their eyes never resting, their hearts never still.

It was beyond bearing. All that they had suffered when they were still professing Jews seemed slight, compared to what they suffered now. What did it boot them that they could hold high office now, and own lands, grow rich, and display their jewels in public? What could anything boot them so long as they had to live in dread? They would have to run away! Though it meant penury, danger, death itself, they must flee! . . .

But how? Ever since their baptism in 1497 there had been laws restricting their departure. Emanuel, knowing well how involuntary had been their conversion, had issued an order forbidding all New Christians to emigrate with their families save by special license from the throne. The order was temporarily rescinded after the massacre of the Maranos in 1506, but it was renewed and made even more stringent after the establishment of the Inquisition in 1531. The New Christians were then forbidden to emigrate even to the Portuguese colonies, and all ship-captains were warned on pain of death not to accept them as passengers.

Nor was this all that deterred the Maranos from flight. Laws did not mean much to them, for they had long ago become adept in ways of evading them. To smuggle oneself out of the land required stealth and bribery, and entailed privations, sometimes even death; but at least it *could* be accomplished. The poor could put their packs on their backs and simply steal across the mountains to France. And the wealthy could exert influence at court and obtain permission to leave on what was ostensibly a commercial voyage to the Indies or the Netherlands. But then what? Even though they did succeed in getting out of Portugal, where were they to go? In the Protestant countries they were considered Catholics, and in the Catholic countries they were heretics. Germany, just then in the throes of the Reformation and at fever heat about religion, was savagely averse to their presence. Jews were either absolutely excluded from the cities there, or else allowed in on the most trying terms. They could not own land; they could not join artisan guilds; they could not even engage in commerce save restrictedly. In most places they were forbidden to open shops facing the street, and in many they were prohibited from going to market before nine or ten in the morning, after the best bargains were gone.

They dared not travel without a costly *Schutzbrief,* or letter of protection; at every town gate they had to pay a *Leibzoll,* or import tax, as though they were so much merchandise. And wherever they went they had to wear a yellow badge of shame. . . .

Yet, compared with the other lands, Germany was relatively tolerant to the Jews. England would not admit them on any terms, and neither would France. Italy was under the thumb of Spain now and necessarily hostile to them; and the Netherlands were a Spanish possession and therefore even more hostile. Even Turkey, which had received the Jews with alacrity when they were driven from Spain in 1492, would no longer allow them in. The whole world seemed closed against them.

There is an ancient rabbinic saying that God, having repented His sternness in driving the Jews from the Holy Land, sundered the Gentile world into a multitude of rival nations so that if the homeless folk were too bitterly oppressed in one land they might find refuge in another. But the providential arrangement failed to work in the sixteenth century. When the Maranos of Portugal looked about them for a place to which to flee, they found every door closed to them. They were left prisoners; shut in by Portugal and shut out by the rest of the world.

For two whole generations they were unable to stir; and their spirits turned to gall within them. They ceased to keep up their secret Jewishness; they almost ceased even to want to keep it up. Now they tried to be

Catholics with a vengeance, attending mass almost as diligently as monks, and eating pork on the least provocation.* They sent their sons into the Church and encouraged them to rise to the highest offices. (There are records of an Espinoza who actually became a cardinal and Grand Inquisitor some time in the sixteenth century.) They built themselves private chapels, endowed monasteries, helped finance cathedrals, and made pilgrimages to Rome. They coated themselves all over with protective coloration, affecting even the improvidence of the Christians, and the intemperance, the violence, the vice.

But it was to no avail. In their very anxiety to be like their neighbors they remained unlike them; the very excess of their conformity gave them away. Despite that they were already of the second generation, or even of the third or fourth, they were still called Christãos Novos, and despised. Nor was that the worst of it. Discrimination and segregation had always been their lot, and they had learnt how to endure such afflictions. What they could not stand was the Inquisition, for it gave them absolutely no rest. They felt its baleful eye continually upon them, watching them through every lattice, glowering down from every roof. As a contemporary writer, Solomon Usque—himself apparently a victim of the Inquisition—declared:

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* It is significant that the descendants of the Majorcan Maranos who still dwell largely in a quarter of their own in Palma are known as the *Chuetas*, the "Pork-eaters."

> "They [the Maranos] slink about with unceasing dread in their hearts. . . . When they sit down together to eat, they take each morsel to their mouths in anguish. . . . At the time of marriage, feasting gives way to dolor; when children are born, rejoicing gives way to woe. . . . Terror rages like a consuming fire in their breasts; their torments are beyond counting. . . ."

But then all at once the fist of Spain was made to unclench in one corner, and at long last the Maranos found a way to escape. The attempt of the Catholic emperor to set up the Inquisition in his northern domains—and the effort of Alba, the governor of those domains, to levy a ruinous sales-tax—had precipitated a revolution there. In 1579, at the Union of Utrecht, the provinces of Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Gelderland, and Zutphen had demanded the right to complete freedom of worship, and had sworn to fight for that right to the death. (The less noble issue of taxation was, of course, left in the background.) And, after a long and bitter war, the Dutch had emerged victorious. Repudiating all allegiance to the tyrant on the throne of Spain, the rebel provinces had welded themselves into an independent republic.

It was the emergence of this new state that provided a place of refuge at last for the Maranos. Some of them, for the most part wealthy sugar merchants with connections in Brazil, had been finding their way to the Netherlands for almost a century already; but these had come almost exclusively for business reasons, and had done nothing to acknowledge their ancestry. Now, however, whole shiploads began to arrive, and with the avowed purpose of seeking religious freedom. The first company of which there is any record set sail probably in 1593. According to the half-legendary accounts which have come down to us, the vessel was captured on the high seas by an English ship, and for a time the passengers were held prisoners in London. Happily for them, one of their company, a maiden of surpassing beauty, was able to win the favor of Queen Elizabeth, and through her pleadings they were all permitted to continue on their way. Storms at sea swept their craft out of its course, and when at last they were able to reach the mainland again, it was at the port of Emden, in Germany. Disembarking there, they espied a house in the town which had a sign over its door written in vaguely reminiscent characters. Half-intuitively they guessed it to be Hebrew, but, still fearful of betraying themselves, they first made discreet inquiries at the inn. And thereupon they were informed that the inhabitant of that house was a pious and learned Jew named Moses Uri.*

One can imagine the emotions of the travellers at this news. All their lives they had heard of such happy beings—of Jews who could profess their faith quite openly, and who dared even proclaim it on the walls of their houses. And here at last they were across the street from one! Had they not been so schooled in restraint, no doubt the whole company would have rushed across there and then to make themselves known to him. Instead, however, only their leader, a certain Jacob Tirado, went; and even he did not confess his identity until he saw that it was quite safe. But once that happened, an astonishing scene ensued. In all probability Moses Uri's eyes had been full of suspicion until that moment. He had held himself on guard, his mind nervously darting about for the real purpose behind the stranger's inquisitiveness. And now all his mistrust was gone. With the passing of a little word between them, he and this foreigner were one. Outwardly they had almost nothing in common. Tirado, who stood with uncovered head, was probably lean and swarthy, perhaps clean-shaven, and, though travel-stained, a little elegant —every inch a Portuguese Christian. And Uri, a full-bearded man wearing a long gaberdine and high skull-cap, must have been no less typically a ghetto Jew. In all probability they understood each other's speech only with difficulty; their very gestures may have been dissimilar. Yet with the passing of that little word, all those differences were forgotten. They knew each other for Jews, and they were one.

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* The documents containing our earliest accounts of this whole episode are to be found—among other places—in the introduction to Gebhardt, *Die Schriften des Uriel da Costa*, 1922.

No record has come down to us of precisely what followed. All we are told is that Tirado and his companions wished to give up their Christian pretensions at once and be received back by Uri into full Jewishness. But the other dissuaded them from the step, saying that in so small a town as Emden the incident would soon leak out and cause scandal. The safety of the few Jews in the community was precarious enough as it was; they could ill afford the risk of being accused of converting Christians. What he thought far wiser would be for the fugitives to go on to Amsterdam, where, according to report, there was less intolerance. He himself would follow, he promised. He would settle among them there with his family, teach them the Hebrew prayers, and receive them into the Covenant.

And thus did the first congregation of Portuguese Jews come into being in Holland. Moses Uri of Emden kept his word and soon followed the company of Maranos whom he had directed to Amsterdam. Renting a house in the Jonkerstraat, he turned one of the chambers into an improvised synagogue and proceeded to instruct his converts in the ritual. It was no easy task, for, much as there was for the Maranos to learn, there was even more for them to unlearn. A century of existence as nominal Christians had left them sadly aberrant Jews. They regarded the rabbi as a priest, and wanted to come to him with confessions so that he might absolve their sins. They venerated their recent martyrs as saints, burnt candles in their honor, and even prayed to them for intercession with Him whom they knew only as

Adonai. They thought it proper to worship with uncovered heads, and on bended knees. And they had so long known the Bible only in the Vulgate translation, that the variants in the Hebrew original seemed to them mistakes.*

But the fugitives were docile pupils, and they tried hard to believe and do that which Moses Uri declared to be the Law. With the discretion that had become second nature to them, however, they made no public display of their religion. Though settled now in free Amsterdam, far removed from the reach of inquisitors, they were still afraid to let it be known that they attended a synagogue. And, since there was a considerable population of foreigners in the city, especially of traders from the Mediterranean lands, the few Jews—they numbered as yet only sixteen—had no difficulty in remaining unnoticed. Even when they were joined by several of their brethren who had been taken prisoner by the English at the storming of Cadiz, they were still able to escape attention.

Indeed, not until four years after its founding was the existence of that synagogue discovered. It happened at the time of the Fast of Atonement in the autumn of 1596. Someone had noticed a number of cloaked figures entering a certain house, and, suspecting they might be Catholic conspirators—for the war with Spain was still being waged—they had at once reported the incident to the magistrates. A number of armed men rushed to the scene, and the worshippers, overwhelmed with terror, took to their heels. That only increased the suspicions of the Amsterdam officers, who, though failing to discover crucifixes, wafers, or other such incriminating evidence, nevertheless insisted on taking Moses Uri and his son to prison. But thereupon Jacob Tirado, "who was able to make himself understood in the Latin language," went before the authorities and succeeded in convincing them that the assembly was not one of Papists, but of Jews. They were fugitives from the Moloch of the Inquisition, Tirado assured the court, and they had brought considerable wealth with them. What was more, if their Honors would mercifully leave them unmolested in Amsterdam, he and the others in the congregation would be able to induce many more of their rich co-religionists to move here from Lisbon, Cadiz, Gibraltar, Madrid, and wherever else they now carried on their trade.

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* See Schwarz, *Os Christãos Novos En Portugal no* Século XX, Lisbon, 1925, which describes the life and belief of the Maranos still to be found living in isolated little colonies in Portugal.

The magistrates were impressed. They were well aware of the great wealth and mercantile connections possessed by the New Christians of the Peninsula, and the thought of attracting a colony of such folk to their own city was most appealing. Those magistrates were no bigots. They knew that tolerance, like honesty, was in the long run the best policy—because it paid. So they straightway ordered the prisoners released, and allowed the fast-day services to be resumed. And thenceforth there was nevermore any interference with the rites of the congregation.

There was, of course, no excess of cordiality toward the practice of those rites, for the populace was intensely fanatical, and even the ruling burghers had no sympathy with religious variance. The tolerance proclaimed by William of Orange, the leader of the revolt against Spain, had never been intended to include more than the various sects of Protestantism. But the Jews, what with their wealth, their cunning, and their studied unobtrusiveness, managed to avoid all open persecution. At first they made no effort to receive recognition as a distinctive sect. They passed themselves off simply as foreigners, and the Dutch learnt to speak of them as *van de natie*, "of the (Portuguese) nation"—an expression still used in Holland to describe the Jews, though originally it had no such religious connotation. When at last they did make application for the privilege of erecting a synagogue, their position in the city was so firmly established, and their influence with the magistrates was so strong, that they could not be refused. There was, of course, considerable opposition on the part of the pastors, and much vehement debate in the town-council; but finally the permission was granted. Jacob Tirado donated the site, the other rich members paid for the building; and the opening years of the seventeenth century saw a real synagogue standing in the town.*

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* Much of the account here given is from J. Zwarts, *Hoofdstukken uit de Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland*, 1929.

Thus arose the community destined to produce one of the greatest of the sons of men. Its growth was rapid from the very start, for once rumors seeped back to Portugal of the freedom obtained among the rebel Dutch, increasing numbers of Maranos began to make their way northward. Rich and poor alike, perfumed hidalgos and grimy armor-makers, learnt to think of Amsterdam as the "New Jerusalem"; and year after year more and more of them fled there. The Spanish rulers, too hard pressed by reverses abroad to have eyes for what was happening at home, hardly noticed how the New Christian population—and with it much of the Peninsula's foreign trade—was melting away. The glory of Spain was waning swiftly, and a ruling caste reared in bigotry, and pampered with stolen gold, seemed impotent to stay the process. The Inquisition continued to plague the New Christians, leaving them no choice but flight; and with their departure the very marrow of the middle-class was drained out of the Iberian lands. The poor went overland, or smuggled themselves out in the holds of cargo-laden vessels. The wealthy sent on their goods and trusted servants in advance, sometimes by way of the Canary Islands in order to divert suspicion; then, when word came back that all was in readiness for them, they themselves with their families took flight.

There was no song in their hearts when they first laid eyes on their place of refuge. Accustomed to the glare and color of their homelands, to the white-walled houses, tiled patios, and tawny-green olive groves, they shuddered at the muddy dullness of Holland. The countryside was marshy and dismally flat; there was not even a hillock to rest the eye. And the city was a hideous excrescence of bricks, a dour huddle of tall, ugly, flat-fronted houses and absurd rococo towers. . . . Yet, for all that, the refugees were glad enough to be in Holland. Even though they were cold here, at least they were free. . . . And they wasted no time before tasting of that freedom, for almost their first act, once they were safely settled in Amsterdam, was to return to their ancestral faith. Though most of them were Christians of the third or fourth generation, their eagerness to revert to the religion so long forbidden them seemed positively vindictive. The males, no matter how old or weak, submitted to the ordeal of circumcision—Moses Uri himself performed the operation two hundred and forty-eight times—and male and female alike began to learn the Hebrew prayers.

The first Portuguese colonists, being uncertain of their welcome and therefore anxious to avoid attention, had settled in the very marshiest and least desirable streets in Amsterdam. Vloijenburg the district was called, that is "Fleatown"—though the name, according to Dr. Hendrik Willem van Loon, was probably derived from the word *vloed* ("tide") rather than *vlooi* ("fleas"), and was given to it because it was the part of the town most frequently inundated when the tide was high. But as the colony grew in size and influence, it began to spread to less squalid streets near by. In 1608, when a schism among the settlers led to the founding of a second synagogue, it was erected not on the muddy Jonkerstraat, but on the broad, tree-lined Burgwal to the north of Vloijenburg.* Long before that time Moses Uri with his German speech and "Ashkenazic," or North-European type of Judaism, had been supplanted by a rabbi imported from Turkey, where the Jews were largely of Iberian origin, and where the "Sephardic," or Spanish type of Judaism, had survived. Soon other rabbis arrived from the Sephardic communities in the Mediterranean lands, and the dissensions which they fomented led to the founding of a third synagogue in 1618. By then the community had already acquired its own burial-ground in the suburb of Ouwerkirk, and with that, two almshouses, three synagogues, and four or more rabbis, it could count itself a flourishing center of Judaism.

The stolid Dutch burghers were altogether bewildered by the strange colony that had so quietly sprung up in their midst. Most of the Jews were, of course, poor and unlettered folk who worked at humble crafts or sorted old rags for a living. They were thin, under-nourished, ugly creatures with eyes like black olives swimming in olive-oil. But the rest were of a quite different type, well-bred, well-clad, and prepossessing. A disproportionate number of them were men of wealth: sugar-factors who controlled plantations in the West Indies, spice-dealers who had agents in Java, and timber-merchants who brought cargoes from Brazil. Quite a disproportionate number, too, were distinguished for their culture: they wrote poetry in Spanish or Portuguese, and had a knowledge of Latin. Several members could boast—and did—that the noblest blood of Spain flowed in their veins; and not a few could confess—but did not—that they had once been prelates and even inquisitors. By and large the members of the Portuguese "nation" were unmistakably a superior lot: well-fed, gracious, and very enterprising.

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* Some historians give the Houtgracht rather than the Burgwal as the name of the street where the new synagogue was built. The confusion may be due to the fact that the same thoroughfare went by different names in succeeding periods. It is no longer in existence, having been made part of the large open square now known as Waterlooplein.

Nevertheless the natives regarded them with distrust. There was a reek of brimstone about those dark-skinned foreigners with their strange speech and stranger faith. Even the leading citizens, wealthy Dutch traders whose commercial ambition tended to discourage all unprofitable prejudice, could not bring themselves to count the strangers as equals. They, too, suspected those Jews, if only because of the furtiveness in their dark eyes and the caution which marked their every movement. The good burghers did not ask what gave those foreigners their nervous air. They had no knowledge of the torments they had endured and the terrors that still obsessed them. All they knew, or cared to know, was that those "men of the nation" were peculiar.

As a consequence, though the Jews were rendering incalculable service to the young republic in its effort to create an overseas empire, they were accorded only reluctant and very partial toleration. Not merely were they refused admission to the trade guilds—a special ordinance to that effect was passed by the magistrates of Amsterdam in 1632—but in addition they were denied all right to hold civil office. For a brief while, indeed, the very privilege of conducting their religious services was withdrawn from them. They had secured that privilege originally not by legal enactment but through connivance with the Amsterdam magistrates. And when, in the year 1615, the Arminian sect which had been suppressed by the Calvinists began to clamor that even the despicable Jews were less harshly treated, the government was compelled to close all the synagogues until a special commission could report on the matter. The report recommended a compromise: each city should be allowed to make its own special regulation with regard to the Jews, either granting them the right of residence—in which case they were to be spared all gratuitous indignities such as the wearing of a special badge—or else expelling them completely.

No record has come down to us of any mass expulsions following the adoption of this report. What Jews there were in Holland were settled almost entirely in the large port towns, and in such communities there was usually enough hard business sense among the magistrates to override the prejudices of the mob. The synagogues were reopened in Amsterdam and life went on as before in the quarter which by now was coming to be known as the "Jodenbuurt." There was still considerable agitation against the Jews, especially in the rural districts, where they were known only by repute; and on occasion this agitation was able to get itself expressed in concrete laws. For instance, so much complaint was made because certain of the Jews, perhaps because of their dark Mediterranean blood, were having their way with the daughters of the land, that an act was passed in 1519 absolutely prohibiting all intercourse between Jews and Christian women.

But such petty persecutions meant little to the refugees after all they had been subjected to in the lands whence they had fled. On the whole they felt they had small reason to complain, for they realized that the natives, though not Catholics, were still Christians—and how could they expect true comradeship from any who professed belief in Christ? So they huddled together in their malodorous Jodenbuurt and thanked God that their lot was not worse. Sometimes they thought back with longing to the lands where they had been born and reared. Their blood was still too thin to cope with the northern cold, and their lungs seemed too weak to withstand the fogs. Besides, they felt themselves hopelessly unakin to the Dutch, as incapable of assuming their torpid demeanor as they were of mouthing their gutturals. Yet the thought of leaving never entered their heads. After all, what more could they ask than was accorded them here in Holland—seeing that they were Jews? What if they could not enjoy the warmth of the southern sun, or the excitement of titled pomp? At least they could live. . . .

CHAPTER II

THE Espinozas joined the Amsterdam colony quite early in its history. The chronicles reveal that during the first years of the congregation's existence an Isaac, an Abraham, and a Doña Sara de Espinoza arrived from Nantes, a Michael Despinoza arrived from Vidigere, and a Hester de Spinose arrived from Lisbon. Whether these were all related, and how, is not known. Despite the discrepant ways in which they spelled their name, and the different places whence they came, they may all have belonged to one family. Orthography meant little in those days, and, among the Jews at least, geography meant even less. It it quite conceivable that these various Espinozas were members of one clan that had become scattered at the time of the expulsion from Spain in 1492.

But their possible relationship is of little concern to us, for of them all only Michael, and to a far lesser degree Hester, play any part in this chronicle. Vidigere, whence Michael Despinoza came, has been identified—by no means for certain—with Vidigueira, a village near

Beja in southern Portugal.* Precisely when he arrived in Amsterdam, and under what circumstances, is not recorded. From the fact that he became in time one of the wardens of the oldest synagogues in the city, it has been assumed that he came with one of the first companies of fugitives. If that assumption is correct, he must have been a mere boy at the time of his arrival, for, though he outlived three wives, his first marriage did not occur until about 1622. How he was reared, and by whom, is altogether unknown. Nor are there any dependable records describing his appearance or character. The oldest biography of Baruch Spinoza speaks of Michael as "a man of good sense" who taught his son "not to confuse superstition with genuine piety"; but that tells us little. Knowing, however, that he became one of the leaders in the synagogue, we may conjecture that he was a man of piety; and knowing further that, though not himself possessed of great wealth, he was honored for a term with the presidency of the communal charity fund, we may conclude that he enjoyed a reputation for honesty. There is no evidence that he was a man of exceptional learning. Of course he must have acquired some knowledge of the synagogue ritual, and could no doubt translate at least the simpler Hebrew prayers; but we have no reason to believe that he had any share in the vigorous cultural life which was one of the distinctions of the little colony.

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* Sir Frederick Pollock (*Spinoza*, 2nd edition, 1912, p. 1) following the common belief of a generation ago, says the elder Despinoza came from Figueira, in central Portugal; but this identification is based on a faulty reading of the documents in the Amsterdam archives. Willem Meÿer, to whose patient and meticulous spade-work we are indebted for much of our new knowledge concerning Spinoza's life, has shown that what was taken to be "Viuger" or "Veiger" was in reality Vidigere. Even so, however, there is still room for dispute over the identification with Vidigueira, as is shown by Dunin-Borkowski, *Der junge De Spinoza,* 1910, p. 85.

He was a merchant by occupation, and from the fact that he continued to live in Vloijenburg long after most of the other Portuguese Jews had deserted that swampy quarter, it is fairly clear that for many years he was not prosperous. Perhaps he had no desire, or lacked the necessary cunning, to be a success in that hard-driven little world of commerce; or perhaps the sequence of tragedies which befell his domestic life left him too little peace of mind to amass a fortune. The very first time we find the man's name mentioned in the congregational records, it is as the father of a child that has passed away. The following year, 1624, a second child died, and three years later his wife was no more. Apparently only one child remained of that ill-starred union, a girl to whom had been given the name Rebecca.

The young widower waited about a year and then, perhaps because he knew it was not well for a man to be without a wife, or for a child to be without a mother, he remarried. But again ill-fortune overtook him: within ten years this second wife was dead. The poor woman was evidently afflicted with consumption, and the squalor of Vloijenburg, coupled with repeated child-bearing, must have been too much for her. Married apparently in 1628, she gave birth to one child, a girl named Miriam, in 1629; to another, a boy called Isaac, at some uncertain date; and finally to a third, a boy who was named Baruch, "Blessed," on November 24, 1632. How much of her intelligence or will or physical appearance was inherited by those children we shall never know. It has been said—the late D. H. Lawrence was forever repeating the saw—that "great men usually have great mothers"; but whether this was true in the case of Spinoza we cannot even conjecture. All that can be said with any assurance is that when Hana Debora Despinoza died, six years after Baruch was born, she left two legacies: a sum of money, which her husband proceeded to sink into his business, and a tendency to tuberculosis which brought her three children to early graves.

One imagines that Rebecca, then a girl of about twelve, assumed sway in the household when the second wife died; and in all likelihood she was none too indulgent to the other children. After all, she was only their half-sister, and, judging from her conduct in later years, she was far from generous in character. Specific details, however, are altogether lacking. There was no seer in Amsterdam to descry the genius soon to burgeon in that little family, so no one thought to chronicle its history. Though the youngest of those children, the lad named Baruch, was destined to become one of the greatest thinkers of modern times, we know almost nothing concerning his early years. Even the erudite Jesuit scholar, Stanislaus von Dunin-Borkowski, who has somehow succeeded in filling more than six hundred closely printed pages on the subject of Spinoza's youth, has very little to offer in the way of relevant historic fact.

It is very vexing, this dearth of data concerning the early life of the philosopher. Even were there no such dearth, we should still find the fact of his genius inexplicable; but, though inexplicable, we might at least find it less inscrutable. As it is, we are left in confusion, for we have nothing but the deceptive murk of conjecture to guide our search for the first influences that may have molded his soul. For instance, it might be significant—were it more than a plausible guess—that the child enjoyed little play-life with companions of his own age. He was reared, we know, in Vloijenburg, and by the time he was grown enough to run about outdoors there were not many Portuguese Jewish families still living in that quarter. Most of them had moved northward to the neighborhood of the Burgwal, where the streets were less muddy and the air less foul, leaving their old haunts to the impoverished German Jews who were just beginning to flock into the town. And there was very little fellowship between members of the older colony and the newcomers. Having dwelt for centuries at a distance from each other, the Sephardim from the Mediterranean lands and the Ashkenazim from Germany had developed all manner of dissimilarities. Not merely were their tongues accommodated to different languages, but their customs, their mannerisms, their rites, their very physiques were not alike. The dark Sephardim in their hidalgo raiment rather despised the pallid Ashkenazim in their gaberdines. Having been reared in the centers of Mediterranean civilization, they could not abide the ways of their brethren from the northern ghettos. And those brethren for their part considered the proud Sephardim half-Gentiles. They could not forget that those lordly ones were former renegades—or at least the sons of renegades—whose knees had bent before idols and whose lips had tasted the flesh of swine.

So in all probability, being the son of a man whose intense devotion to his own Portuguese synagogue may have brought with it a corresponding narrowness, little Baruch was not encouraged to play with the sons of the Ashkenazim in the neighborhood. Of course, had he been a robust youngster he might not have waited to be encouraged. Heedless of the prejudices of his elders, undaunted even by the obstacle of his Portuguese speech, he would somehow have created a gregarious existence for himself. But the taint of phthisis was in his blood, and—despite the instance of a John Keats, who likewise came of tubercular stock and yet was exceedingly vigorous as a boy—one imagines Baruch was never very strong. Indeed, his earliest biographer definitely assures us that Baruch "did not enjoy good health at any time in the whole course of his life," and that "he suffered from the time of his most tender youth."

One imagines that his brother, too, may have been frail—he died while still in his teens—and also his sister Miriam, who likewise died when quite young. It is likely, therefore, that all three children were inclined to shun rather than seek outside companionship. They probably kept to themselves most of the time, creating an introverted life of their own in the little house to which they were confined. It must have been largely a cheerless life, too, for their mother was dead, and their father was not well-off, and a half-sister ruled over them. No doubt there were also recurrent distempers to depress them, for with their heredity they must have been easy prey for the mephitic airs of Vloijenburg. No wonder that Baruch could write in later years: "Cheerfulness is always good, and can never be excessive." Already in earliest childhood he may have learnt how precious was the trait.

But the character of Baruch's life must have changed when he was nearing seven, for at about that age he was entered as a pupil in the local Hebrew school. It was the tradition in Israel to make much of that event in a boy's life, for, as the Talmud put it, "the whole universe is sustained by the breath from the mouths of the school-children." The house of learning was the armory of the Jews, the place where they learnt how to seek grace before God and take their own part among men. The popular custom, at least in medieval times, was to make a memorable ceremony of a boy's first lesson in the Holy Tongue. He was awakened before dawn on that day, bathed and dressed in his Sabbath clothes, and taken to the synagogue for the morning prayers.

And there, sleepy as he might be, he was made to take part in the service. When the Scroll of the Law was brought out of the Ark and opened, the child was conducted to the lectern and told to listen while the portion of the week was intoned by the cantor. Then he was wrapped in a prayer-shawl—avowedly to guard against the evil eye—and led away to school. He was not, however, taken directly to the classroom, there to sit bewildered, perhaps half in tears, amid a mocking mob of older scholars. Instead the boy was received in private, and, seated on the teacher's lap, was given a slab on which were inscribed the first four and last four letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Gently he was urged to repeat their sounds after the teacher—*aleph*, ALEPH, *beth*, BETH, *gimmel*, GIMMEL, *dalet*, DALET—and, so soon as the child knew them by heart, the letters were smeared thick with honey which he was allowed to lick away.*

In such a manner was a Jewish child encouraged to cross the threshold into the world of learning. During many generations the event was even made the occasion for a feast. At sundown the father of the boy, having fasted all day long, would invite his friends, and the poor of the neighborhood, to a laden table, and would ask them to pray with him that his son grow up "blessed in the Holy Law, full of the fear of God, and rich in goodly deeds throughout a long life." Whether such was still the custom in the seventeenth century we do not know. Not impossibly the whole ritual connected with the first lesson had fallen into abeyance among the Sephardim in Amsterdam; but more probably it had survived. For the rabbis, and not a few of the congregants, had been reared in the Sephardic settlements in the Levant and North Africa, where the traditional life of Jewry had been preserved intact. One imagines, therefore, that Baruch may have long remembered the excitement of the day on which he was ushered into the world of learning.

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* An account of the ritual is given in the *Makhzor Vitry*, paragraph 508, a liturgical work of the twelfth century.

Happily for the boy—and for the world also—the school in which he was enrolled was better than most in Israel in that day. It had just been organized that year, and served the whole Sephardic community in Amsterdam. Previously there had been several smaller schools conducted by individual rabbis, but these had all been abolished when, in 1639, the three rival congregations in the colony were made one. The new school was housed in what had been the Beth Israel Synagogue on the Burgwal, and was only a few steps from the enlarged house of worship now used by the united congregation. (The oldest of the synagogues, Beth Jacob in Vloijenburg, to which Michael Despinoza had belonged, had been abandoned altogether since the merger.) The fact that the school could boast a building of its own was in itself enough to raise it above the run of such institutions. But what distinguished it even more was its relatively enlightened curriculum. The instruction was graded, and each of the classes—there were six in all—

had a room and teacher to itself. The course began with the Hebrew alphabet, continued with readings in the prayer-book, then went on to the translation of the Pentateuch and its simpler commentaries, then to the Prophets and the Writings, and only at the very end, when the entire Old Testament had been mastered, did it plunge the pupil into the Talmud.*

One suspects the presence of Jesuit influence in the framing of that curriculum. Some forty years had already elapsed since the Society of Jesus had adopted the scheme of graded education outlined in its *Ratio Studiorum,* and many of the Sephardim in Amsterdam must have been products of schools in which that scheme was employed. Likely enough it was thus that the suggestion first came to grade the teaching in the new Hebrew school on the Burgwal. Until then—indeed, almost until the present day in most Hebrew schools in Eastern Europe—it was usual to set the child floundering in the Talmud almost as soon as it had waded through the Five Books of Moses. Isaiah and Jeremiah, Job and Ecclesiastes—these had no place in the curriculum. At the age of thirteen, when the boys were confirmed as "Sons of the Commandment," the brighter among them could gouge their thumbs through whole tractates of the Babylonian Gemara, and yet not know a single chapter of the Prophets or the Writings.

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* Shabbethai Bass, a Polish scholar who found his way to Amsterdam in 1679, gives an account of the curriculum in the introduction to his *Sifte Yeshenim,* trans. by Güdemann, in *Quellenschriften zur Gesch. des Unterrichtswesens,* p. 112 *et seq.*

And what was even worse, there was rarely if ever any separation into classes in the ordinary Hebrew School. The institution was known as a *heder*—that is, a "room"—and usually deserved the name. Sometimes it was held in the very living-quarters of the teacher, whose slatternly wife would be nursing her baby, or cooking at the stove, while the lessons were going on. The children would be gathered in small groups in the various corners, or around one long wooden table, and each would be encouraged to recite his lesson in a loud singing voice. The teacher would move from group to group, listening, correcting, sometimes leading in the sing-song—and never sparing the rod in his hand. Discipline was, of course, impossible; nor could there be anything like ordered progress in the studies. Somehow the children did acquire a knowledge of the prayer-book and a smattering of the Holy Law—but at the expense of time, energy, and pain sufficient to master half the learning in the universe.

It was far otherwise in the Amsterdam school, as more than one visiting rabbi from Germany and Poland was quick to point out at the time. Here, as we have said, each class had its own room and teacher, and the course of instruction, though narrow in its scope, was at least organized and thorough. The one grave fault was, of course, the exclusive devotion to synagogue learning. No provision whatsoever was made for secular studies in the school itself, and almost no time was left for them outside of school. The pupils were expected to attend the Hebrew classes from eight in the morning until eleven, and again from two in the afternoon until dusk. At most, therefore, it was barely possible to find one more hour in the day for study, and that had to be devoted to Dutch. For even the language of the country was not taught in the school, the instruction there being entirely in Portuguese and Spanish!

It does not seem to have occurred to anyone to correct that defect. An education in those days was still counted a luxury, and therefore was not allowed to bear too close a relation to the material concerns of everyday life. Among the Jews, even more than among the Christians, its ultimate purpose was to fit one for the next world rather than for this. And that was why so little heed was paid to secular subjects in the school on the Burgwal. Besides, the aim of the synagogue elders was to raise up a generation of true Sons of Israel rather than of loyal citizens of Holland. For in their hearts those elders were rather contemptuous of the population in whose land they had taken refuge. In part that may have been because they knew the population was contemptuous of *them.* Those Jews were no fools. They realized all too well that they were merely tolerated in the land, and tolerated only because of their commercial cunning. And the knowledge goaded them to an arrogance as insistent as it was insincere. Perhaps unconsciously it was out of a hunger for vengeance that they would not impart the learning of the Gentiles to their children.

And the children were given no chance to murmur. Six hours of Hebrew in the classroom each day, and an additional hour or two of Dutch tutoring at home, left them neither time nor energy for much recalcitrance. Besides, parental authority was exceedingly strict in the Jodenbuurt. It must have been incessant torment for many of those youngsters to remain all day long in the school. Outside lay the great city of Amsterdam beckoning them to explore its wonders. There were great palaces there, and crested towers, deserted ramparts, and noisy market-places. Gayly-painted yachts lay moored along the banks of the Amstel, their metal fittings glinting in the sunlight, and broad barges overloaded with produce floated slowly through the canals. Wherever one turned there was a bridge, and one could loiter on them for hours without wearying of the sights one saw. Or, if one craved real adventure, one could wander down to the wharves along the Ij, where the great sea-going vessels were docked. There one could see the men-o'-war just returned from the Indies or the Americas, their wooden sides scarred and splintered, their hatches still blotched with dried blood. There, too, one could see the giant freighters from foreign lands, mysterious bales piled high on their decks, strange flags flying from their masts. Bronzed men with rings in their ears and dirks in their belts sweated at the windlasses and swore with gusto. Belaying pins fell with a terrifying clatter, hawsers groaned, and timbers creaked. And a little boy looking on from behind a coil of rope on the wharf could feel his heart pound with excitement. The smell of spices and tar and decayed wood was in his nostrils; the taste of salt air was on his lips. And he was ready to shout for joy.

Only rarely, however, could the boys from the Jodenbuurt indulge in such adventures. In the first place, they were afraid of running foul of the gangs of native youths prowling in the streets. And in the second place, they had too little time. At most they could loiter a few moments on the way to or from school, or take a slow walk through the town with their fathers on Sabbath afternoons. The rest of the time they had to sit penned in a small, ill-ventilated classroom and sing themselves hoarse at their lessons. The instruction there, though revised in content, was still largely medieval in method. The teacher, usually a snuffy, bearded, elderly man with a dazed look in his eyes and a frustrate droop to his mouth, sat at the head of a long table; and the pupils were ranged on narrow benches on either side. There was very little individual recitation, at least in the lower classes. The whole class spelled out the Hebrew words in unison, the diligent students at the top of their voices, and the dull or lazy ones in an inarticulate mumble. The teacher either led the chorus or else listened half mechanically, bestirring himself from time to time to prod the drones with a blow.

The problem of enforcing discipline was, of course, not nearly so acute there as in the ordinary ghetto *heder;* but nevertheless it was present. One imagines there was continual kicking going on underneath the table, and no little surreptitious pinching and pin-pricking. If the teacher turned his back for a moment, half the class was probably on its feet and fighting. For there was little in the lesson to hold their attention. Throughout the first year the boys did nothing but read from the prayer-book without ever being told the meaning of what they read. Hebrew was the sacred tongue, and all prayers recited in it—or in Aramaic, its cognate—were believed to be efficacious even if not a word of them was understood.

And in the second year, which was devoted to the reading of the Five Books of Moses, there was still no attempt at translation. The chief aim in this class was to teach the pupils the traditional melody in which the Law was chanted in the synagogue. They had to watch the microscopic signs, the hooks and angles and colons printed above or beneath each syllable of the text, and give to them the peculiar tonal value established by custom. Most of those melodic sounds were of Oriental origin, for their like was to be heard in the mosques when the Koran was chanted, and in the Byzantine and Armenian churches during mass. And the rest were apparently derived from the Catholic plain-song of the Dark Ages. Queer tones they were to ears attuned to the music of another world, broken quavers and shrill ricochettings which sounded altogether barbaric. Yet those lads of eight or so had to sit swaying for hours on end and chant the melodies over and over. Originally the cantillation had been set to the sacred text in order to bring out its meaning; but of this the boys knew nothing. They were simply told to listen to the teacher and sing as he sang—and then keep it up all day long. It was not always easy to see the tiny notes, for there were not enough books to go around, and most of the pupils had to crane over each other's shoulders. Besides, the light in the room was poor, especially when the window was closed against the cold and the breath from the shouting throats made the panes opaque. Yet the boys had to keep on singing. Their eyes might grow red and painful, their voices might crack and their bodies might ache—but still they had to go on singing.

No record has come down to us of how little Baruch took to his lessons during those first years of schooling. The chances are that he was apt and eager, for the reputation for studiousness which we know him to have enjoyed a few years later could hardly have been come by of a sudden. Even as a child he may have discovered the adventure lurking in each page of print, and his large black eyes may have rarely strayed from the text during the lesson-hours. His whole constitution—unless our picture of him be altogether false—must have predisposed him to study, for there could have been no excess of vigor in his small frame to be vented in mischief or horseplay. (As Novalis once asked—and Prof. Alfred Adler has since answered—"Does not the best everywhere begin with illness?") Baruch's undersized body must have made him helpless in the presence of bullies; and his name, which could so easily be corrupted to *spinazie,* meaning "spinach"—as it is in a nursery rhyme recited to this day in Holland—may have made him the butt of much teasing. Had he lacked spirit, such disadvantages might have crushed the lad. He might have grown up abject and cowardly, a forlorn and irresolute thing, always quailing and afraid. But, judging from the reserves of independence which were in him in later years, as a boy he must have been, if anything, over-spirited. And that very excess may have been what goaded little Baruch to excel in his school-work. Hampered physically, his will to achieve had no other means of asserting itself save through feats of the mind. The classroom became his stronghold, and his seat at the table his sentry-box. When school was out, one imagines he went straight home, never loitering on the bridges to watch the barges float by, never running off to play pirate down by the Ij. For he was probably ill-at-ease out in the open, afraid and therefore at odds with it. One imagines he preferred to stay indoors, where he could fashion a world to his own liking and roam in it at will. Such yielding to his fears was no doubt bad for the boy—at least, so the pedagogues of our own day might insist. It made him shy and introverted, a timid child whose glance was ever lowered and whose shoulders were already stooped. But bad or good, it apparently did happen; and the result was that a philosopher emerged.

No one knows what manner of home-life Baruch led during these years. As we have already suggested, it was probably far from happy, if only because there was no mother to care for the four children in the household. And Michael Despinoza himself may have realized this, for hardly had three years elapsed after his second wife was laid to rest, than he was married for the third time. Judging from the type of woman he selected, his purpose in remarrying was to secure a mother for his children rather than a wife for himself. She was a spinster who confessed to being about forty years of age, and she may have been a relative, for her name, too, was Despinoza. That is all we know about the woman, for, aside from the inscription on her tombstone, we have only two contemporary references to her existence. The first is the record of the publication of the banns:

> *There appeared the aforesaid Michael de Espinose* [the varying orthography is of no consequence] *from Vloijenburg, and Hester de Spinose from Lisbon, about forty years of age, no parents, accompanied by Margreta Fernand, her sister, dwelling-place as above. The 11th of April, 1641.*
> (Signed) *Michael Despinoza,*
> *Ester despinoza.*

And the second is the record of the marriage:

> *On the 28th of April, 1641, there were joined in wedlock Michael de Espinosa from Vidiger, widower of Debora Despinosa, and Hester de Espinosa from Lisbon, both residing in Vloijenburg.**

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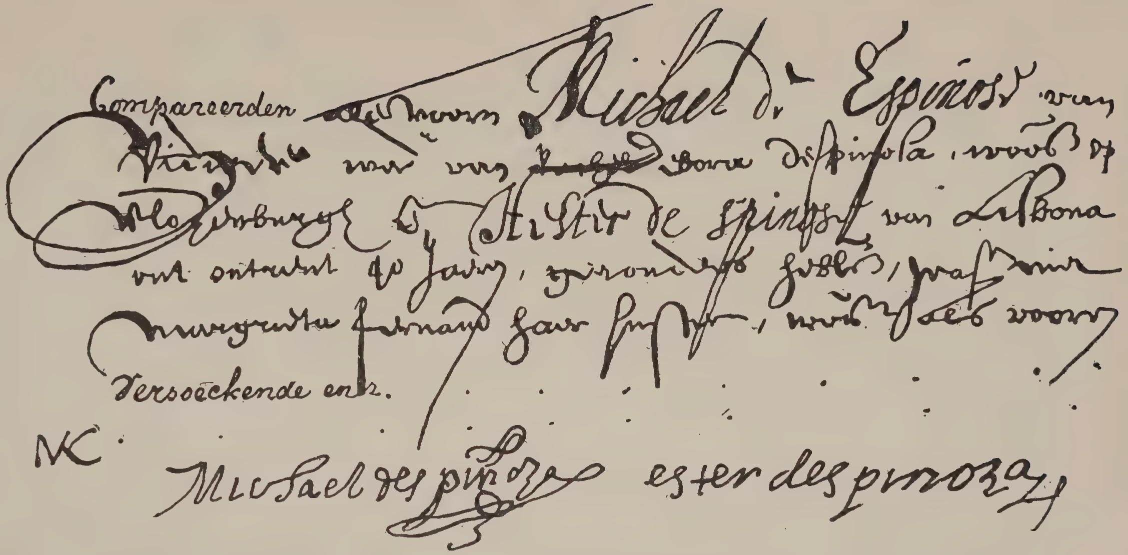
* Both these records, and most of the others relative to Spinoza's life, are given in Gebhardt, *Spinoza Lebensbeschreibungen und Gespräche*, Leipzig, 1914, pp. 125-6.



Compareerden als voren Michael de Espinosa van
Vidigere wedr van Hana ~~[illegible]~~ Dora d'Espinola, woont op
Uylenburgh en Ester de Espinosa van Lisbona
out ontrent 40 jaren, geen ouders hebbende, geassisteert met
Margrieta Fernandes haer suster, woonende als voren
Versoeckende etc.

NC

Michael despinoza ester despinoza

PUBLICATION OF MARRIAGE-BANNS OF SPINOZA'S FATHER AND STEP-MOTHER, APRIL 11, 1641—
from the Amsterdam Puijeboeck.

But though we know so little about the woman, it is clear that her coming into the household of Michael Despinoza wrought great changes. Either she brought a dowry with her, or else she spurred her husband to unwonted activity in his business. Of a sudden we discover the family no longer living in squalid Vloijenburg, but across the canal on the Burgwal, quite near the synagogue. According to tradition it was here that Baruch was born, and a memorial tablet at No. 14 Waterlooplein, the house now occupying the site on what was once the Burgwal, still proclaims the fact. Recent investigation has made it clear, however, that not until after 1614 were the Despinozas able to boast that address.

Not that the Burgwal was a particularly imposing thoroughfare; on the contrary, compared with the streets inhabited by the richer Christians, it was probably mean in appearance. As its name revealed, it was part of what had once been the moat of a castle, and the canal at its side, the Houtgracht as it was called, may have been used chiefly by barges transporting lumber to and from the neighboring woodyards. But mean as the street may have been, it was at least an improvement over the alleys in Vloijenburg; indeed, it was probably the finest thoroughfare in the whole Jodenbuurt. For the Jewish colony, despite that it had become by now one of the most prosperous elements in the city's population, still preferred to live in obscurity. It was afraid to court attention by any display of affluence, for its political position was still exceedingly precarious. With the discretion inbred in them, even the richest Jews dwelt in houses whose exteriors looked poor and forbidding. The walls were of plain brick, and there was very little ornamentation over the doors or around the gables. Not until one crossed the thresholds could one see evidence of the wealth of the owners. Rich carpets from the Levant lay on the floors, and splendid tapestries bedecked the walls. Enormous chandeliers hung from the ceiling; pewter and silver shone on the shelves; massive chests, brass-bound and finely carved, stood in the corners. The rooms were perhaps not so clean-swept as those in the houses of the Christian burghers, but that may have been in part because they were too cluttered. These Jews, traffickers in merchandise for sixteen centuries or more, were inveterate collectors. If they were poor they collected old rags and copper vessels; if they were rich, they gathered fine brocades and lustrous plate. Never able to own lands—at least, never for long at a time—they knew no other way of investing their surplus wealth save in portable belongings. Besides, savage experience had taught them that it was not safe to invest their wealth in any save such belongings. They dared not buy fields and forests even though it was permitted them, for they knew not how soon they might be sent packing from the land. So instead they hoarded objects. They turned their homes into so many warehouses, stuffing all the rooms, the halls, even the attics with goods.

It was probably to such a house that the Despinozas moved when Baruch was about nine or so. The improvement over the dwelling-place in Vloijenburg must have been enormous. Not merely was the house more commodious, but in addition the neighborhood was far less noisome. The vapour rising from the canals, the fog from the sea, the damp from the marshes on which the whole city was reared—these things were, of course, as pervasive on the Burgwal as in the alley whence the family had fled. But at least there was less squalor here, less mud in winter, fewer insects in summer, and less pestilence all year round. The street was probably cobbled, and tall elms may have lined the bank of the canal. The dwellings were not mere hovels tottering on their rotted piles, but stout brick houses standing square and erect. The move came too late to prevent the fate that heredity and Vloijenburg had already bred in Hana Debora's offspring; but not too late at least to retard it. One imagines that Baruch and his brother and sister began to lose a little of their sallowness in the less tainted air of the Burgwal. Their bodies probably grew stronger, their lungs began to expand, and the sound of their coughing became rarer.

Home and school must have encompassed Baruch's life to a greater degree now than ever before. There was only a few doors' distance between them, and the boy was spared even those short walks across the canal which he had had to take each day when he lived in Vloijenburg. He was still studying the Bible, but now at last he was learning its meaning. Curiously, the vernacular into which the Hebrew was rendered was not Portuguese but Spanish. Of the two, Spanish was the older and in a sense the classic language of the Sephardim. Much of their secular literature was written in it, and in the Levant, where most of them had taken refuge after their expulsion from Spain, it was still their mother-tongue. So even in Amsterdam, despite that the majority of the colony may have been more familiar with Portuguese, the other language was shown the preference in religious matters. With the intense conservatism characteristic of exiles, these Jews had grown to consider the Spanish tongue almost sacred. All the congregational records were kept in it, and even the ritual of the synagogue lapsed into it on occasion.

Baruch could have found no difficulty in understanding the language, for he had always heard it spoken in the Jodenbuurt, and, in the corrupt form it had assumed there, it was not much different from the Portuguese he had learnt at home.* And through the medium of this already familiar tongue, he finally began to understand Hebrew. Who his teacher was we do not know. Dunin-Borkowski has unearthed the names of three of the instructors in the lower grades of the school during these years—Mordecai de Castro, Joseph de Faro, and Jacob Gometz—but no record is left of their character or appearance. The probability is, of course, that they were of the type still to be found teaching Hebrew in the old Jewish centers: poor, sad, unworldly beings whose faces told all too plainly how trying they found their daily toil. For the majority of the boys who were sent to them for instruction seemed to be little demons or else witless louts. Their minds—those who had them—appeared to be on everything save their lessons, and neither threats nor blows could make them pay heed in class. Poor men! It did not occur to them that the fault might be in themselves. Blinded as they were by tradition, they could not see how unintelligent were their ways of teaching. They might have made the task of translating the Bible an adventurous exploration into an old Oriental storybook; but instead they made it a tormenting exercise. The teacher sat there at the head of the table, swaying to and fro as he read and translated the text; and the pupils, like so many parrots, had to repeat each phrase after him:

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* Some biographers are of the opinion that Spinoza heard Spanish rather than Portuguese spoken even in his home. They have, however, no conclusive proof to offer, and the probabilities are certainly against their view.

"Va-yehi Mahalalel, and Mahalalel lived,
  Va-yehi Mahalalel, and Mahalalel lived;
Hamesh shanim, five years,
  Hamesh shanim, five years;
Ve-shishim shana, and sixty years,
  Ve-shishim shana, and sixty years;
Va-yoled et-yorad, and begat Jarad,
  Va-yoled et-yorad, and begat jarad;
Va-yehi Jarad, and Jarad lived,
  Va-yehi Jarad, and Jarad lived; . . .

So it went on and on, on and on. It was the traditional method of teaching, a method dating back to the days before printing, when all primary learning had to be acquired by ear. The Talmud taught that the royal road to knowledge was paved with repetition. "To repeat a passage one hundred and one times," it declared, "is better than to repeat it a hundred times." And the teachers in the Amsterdam Hebrew school in the seventeenth century still adhered to that maxim. Little wonder that the boys fidgeted, yawned, thumped each other as they swayed on the benches, or kicked and pinched beneath the table. They were bored with the monotonous chanting. The teacher might glower at them; he might shout and brandish his rod. But it was of little avail. For a brief while there would be peace again, all the boys swaying with extravagant vigor and chanting with all their might. But soon there would be a renewal of the scuffling. A choked cry would be heard as a swinging toe found a shin. Someone would chuckle vengefully, and then suddenly groan as the kick was returned. The teacher would leap up in despairing rage, shout a curse, and deal blows right and left. And then once more there would be order—for the moment. . . .

But one imagines that son of Michael Despinoza was rarely among those who caused such disturbances. Far more likely he was one of the attentive boys, his thin little legs always keeping to themselves beneath the bench, his eyes never straying from the text. When the Sabbath day came and the fathers stood by to hear their sons recite the week's lesson, Baruch probably had no need to be prompted. He knew what had been taught him: remembered each word, each meaning, each intonation. One pictures the teacher looking up from where he sat at the head of the table and smiling proudly to the boy's father—and the latter returning the look with joy.

"A good lad!" they would agree in a half-audible whisper. "Aye, he deserves the name Baruch."

CHAPTER III

THE years passed, and Baruch continued to advance in the school. He went on from the Pentateuch to the Prophets and Writings, learning not alone how to chant and translate them, but also how to interpret them according to Rashi. That great medieval scholar had been a vintner in northern France, and it would seem that a little of the sweetness of his wines had become distilled in his Bible commentaries. Once one became familiar with the peculiar type in which they were always printed, those commentaries were fascinating to read. There was no gratuitous sermonizing in them, and no dull disputation. Nor did they contain much fumbling in the dark of Hebrew grammar. Instead they were replete with naive legends and fables, many of them culled from Talmudic sources, many from other rabbinic writings, and many from common folklore. Here and there they gave one a glimpse into medieval French, for Rashi often sought to explain an obscure Hebrew word by translating it into the vernacular of his region. Often, too, they plunged one into science, for the author was versed in arithmetic, botany, astronomy, and medicine. To a lad blessed with curiosity and imagination Rashi's work was a mighty storehouse of knowledge.

And when Baruch had thus chanted and explained his way all through the Old Testament, he passed on at last to the Talmud. That was in his fifth year in the school, when he was about twelve. To accustom his mind to this far more recondite discipline, only selected passages were studied at first. They were taken largely from those tractates of the Talmud dealing with the laws of diet, Sabbath observance, and prayer, and they were read with as little hair-splitting as the disputatious subject-matter made possible. Further to simplify the study, the pupils were required to memorize parts of the *Shulkhan Arukh,* which was an abstract of the entire Holy Law. The purpose was not so much to train the mind as to fortify the soul, for the Jews counted nothing more conducive to piety than a knowledge of the Law.

What little time remained for other studies in this fifth year was given over to learning the elements of Hebrew grammar. Thus far the pupils had been left largely in ignorance as to the structure of the language they had been studying all this while; and even now they were taught very little about it. In part that was because an acquaintance with grammar was considered unessential. (Knowing a noun from a verb could hardly win one entrance to Heaven!) And in part it was because such an acquaintance was believed to be fraught with danger. Grammar was an exact and unyielding discipline, and if one employed it too pertinaciously when studying the Word of God, one was apt to discover more than one could understand. The whole of Judaism was founded on that Word of God, and it was not safe to peer into it too critically. Otherwise one might be betrayed into vain doubt. One might be led to suspect that there were flaws in the sacred text: misspellings, elisions, even discrepancies. More than one Jewish scholar in the past—and even in the present, in godless places like Italy—had suffered that unspeakable fate. So grammar, though included in the curriculum, was not studied until the fifth year; and then only sketchily.

In the sixth and highest class there was some further inquiry into the rules governing the Hebrew language; but the subject was still considered of secondary importance. What took up most of the time in this class was the Talmud, which was now studied page by page, and in great earnest. And the teacher was none other than the rabbi of the congregation, the *haham*, the "wise man," as he was called.

There was more than one rabbi in the colony at the time—it was only a few years since the three synagogues had become united—but foremost among them was a certain Saul Levi Morteira, and he in all likelihood had charge of the class. Morteira was a full-bearded, heavy-featured man in his early fifties, a Venetian by birth, but of Portuguese extraction. His history deserves recounting, if only for the light it sheds on the environment in which Baruch was reared. The man had been living in Amsterdam for almost thirty years already, though he had come originally with no intention to stay. In his youth he had been a student of medicine under the great Elias Montalto, physician to Maria de Medici, queen of France; but his apprenticeship had been cut short by the sudden death of his master in 1616. The tragedy occurred while the physician was accompanying the royal family to Tours, and the queen, who had a great affection for the man despite that he was a Jew, was most anxious to have his remains put to rest in a Jewish burial-ground. So far as she knew, however, there was no such place in all of France, for it was more than two centuries since the Jews had been expelled from the land, and hardly a year since her own husband, Louis XIII, had issued an edict warning all Christians on pain of death against sheltering any who might have smuggled their way back. (He and his queen evidently felt that the edict did not apply to themselves.) The nearest Jewish cemetery was the one recently consecrated by the Portuguese colony in Amsterdam; so thither she had to have the body transported. Young Morteira, having been a disciple of the physician, and of the same faith, was sent along to see that the rites were properly performed; and it was thus that he was brought to the Dutch city. Once there, he was persuaded to stay as the haham in one of the synagogues, for, as was quite common in those days, he had received a thorough training in Hebrew lore before he had begun to study medicine.

He succeeded as a haham. He was not nearly so learned, at least in the Talmud, as were the rabbis among the Ashkenazim; but he was quite learned enough for the Sephardim. What if he had never charted all the microscopic *tosafot* dotting the margins of the Gemara like teacherous reefs around an island? What if he could not distort already distorted texts and drag them in by their tails, indeed by the last hairs in their tails, to help re-solve a problem? At least he did know enough to be able to teach schoolboys.

His real limitations were in another direction, as at least one of his pupils was soon to discover. Morteira was inclined to be domineering. Like so many of the rabbis, especially among the Sephardim, he had extravagant notions of the authority to which he was entitled because of his office. Product that he was of a world steeped in clericalism, he thought of himself as not merely a teacher but also a priest—a being distinguished not alone for learning, but even more for holiness. And his congregants seem to have shared his opinion, for they, too, had been reared among Catholics and had become addicted to the veneration of the cloth. What probably intensified the prejudice in Morteira's own mind was the fact that he may have deemed himself deserving to be more than a rabbi. After all, what had he made of his life? He might have been a great court physician by now, an intimate of lords and ladies, a power behind royal bedsteads. He might have gone about clad in velvets and bedecked with jewels, a darkly mysterious personage stalking proudly in marble halls and prescribing purgatives for queens. But instead he was a denizen of an ill-smelling, flea-infested ghetto, a hard-driven haham receiving but six hundred guilders and a hundred baskets of fuel a year, and expected for that to expound the Holy Law all year round, preach in the synagogue three times a month, and teach the Talmud in the Hebrew school several hours each day. . . .

The earliest biography of Spinoza, that turbidly eulogistic document usually attributed to Jean Maximilien Lucas, is far from just to Morteira.* It makes him out a splenetic, spiteful, mendacious bigot who could pursue one who dared brook his will with the remorselessness of a villain out of melodrama. But instead Morteira, with all his faults, may have been a quite likable character. One virtue even Lucas concedes to him: the man was quick to perceive Baruch's precocity, and did not hesitate to laud it in public.

The elder Despinoza, hearing the rabbi's praise of the boy, must have been elated. Prosperity had not weakened the man's piety. He was still full of the fear of the Lord, and very active in the affairs of the Lord's house. He had already served a term as one of the five trustees of the united congregation, and the time was not far off when he would be made no less than president. He must have been exceedingly proud, therefore, to be the father of a boy like Baruch. He made no effort to terminate his son's studies when that year, the last in the Hebrew school, was over. Instead he let him go on to the *yeshivah*, the academy. It was, of course, no extraordinary step for a father in Israel to take. Jews far poorer than Michael Despinoza were wont to let their sons continue with their studies though they were already grown enough to go out and earn their livelihood. Even in Amsterdam, where profound devotion to Hebrew scholarship had as yet hardly had time to take root, it had already been found necessary to make provision for such students. A yeshivah named *Etz Hayim*, the "Tree of Life," had been founded in 1640, and when Baruch was ready to enter it, some five years later, it appears to have been a flourishing institution.

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* The document is now accessible to English readers in an excellently annotated edition entitled *The Oldest Biography of Spinoza,* by Prof. A. Wolf, New York, 1928.

No specific details have come down to us concerning the years which Baruch spent in that yeshivah. All we know is that he became a student there when he was about thirteen, and that he did not leave until he was over twenty. When he entered, it was apparently with no utilitarian purpose in mind. He was simply going on with his religious studies, as became a youth of his parentage and talents. Only a minority of the students, and they the older ones, studied in the yeshivah with the fixed intention of entering the rabbinate; the rest attended simply to learn more of the Holy Law. As a group they were most likely of a rather serious turn of mind: pious, diligent, and full of respect for their teachers. There was no need to treat them like the pupils in the lower school; they could be allowed to come and go more or less as they pleased, for they were not likely to be idle. There were no fixed hours for study, and no set course to follow. They usually came to the synagogue early in the morning to put on the phylacteries and join in the congregational service, and then remained in the place until nightfall. Some time during the day it was customary for them to gather together for a semi-public disquisition on the Talmud; but the rest of the time they read by themselves, calling on their teachers only when in difficulties.

Among those teachers there was a man of extraordinary character and ability named Manasseh ben Israel. He was younger than Morteira, and never attained the other's influence in the Jodenbuurt; but he lived to become incomparably more important in the eyes of the world. Manasseh's history, like that of his colleague, is well worth recounting, for it, too, throws light on the strange little world in which Baruch was reared. His father, a Marano in Lisbon, had run foul of the Inquisition in 1603, but luckily had been able to escape the flames. After having been flung into a dungeon and thrice tortured, he had been let off with no more than a public humiliation, the confiscation of his wealth, and the abrogation of all his civil rights. There had been nothing left then for the poor man save flight. Even though his wife was apparently with child at the time, he smuggled her aboard a vessel and escaped with her to La Rochelle in France, where, in 1604, she gave birth to Manasseh.

The little family did not tarry long in France. Like so many other Marano fugitives, Joseph and his wife were drawn to the "New Jerusalem" in Holland; and there the oft-repeated prayer, "May God make thee like Ephraim and Manasseh," was fulfilled in their son. For at least three generations the family had been Christian, but the baptismal waters had left their Jewish blood unthinned. Manasseh became the disciple of one of the rabbis in Amsterdam, and when his master died, he succeeded to the office. He was only eighteen at the time, but he had studied diligently, was gifted with eloquence, and seemed altogether worthy to be a haham. For seventeen years thereafter he continued to serve in one of the local synagogues, preaching with such brilliance and writing so learnedly that his fame spread throughout the countryside. Especially the Christians were attracted to him, for he carried his erudition like a wand and could discourse, it would seem, on anything. He claimed to know ten languages, and did write at least in five—Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew, English, and Latin. He knew the classics, had a smattering of astrology, and was at home—perhaps too much so—in the Kabala. Above all, he was persuasive. He had a genius for intellectual merchandizing: he could take rags and tatters from a hundred sources—allegories, arguments, quotations, misquotations—and make of them dazzling parcels which few could resist snatching from his hands. Many a scholarly personage travelling through Amsterdam made it a point to seek him out and ask him questions. Rembrandt did his portrait, and made four etchings to illustrate one of his books. Learned pastors corresponded with him from all over northern Europe, and professors of divinity translated his works into German, Latin, Dutch, and English. Protestantism with its rooted bibliolatry had contributed a peculiar prestige to Hebrew, and Christians unable to master the tongue found Manasseh's writings highly convenient. His extensive quotations from the Talmud and the Kabala threw what seemed to them new light on the Scriptures, and his ardent Messianism provided them with new keys to the Bible prophecies. Calvinists, Lutherans, Arminians, Socinians, even Jesuit priests cultivated his friendship. So highly did they esteem his learning and piety that some of them could not help asking him why he did not turn Christian!

But Manasseh's excellence was less appreciated by his own people. His colleagues in the local rabbinate quarrelled with him continually, for they were at once envious of his fame and contemptuous of his efforts to attain it. They considered him vain, shallow, and insufferably ambitious. And his congregants, too, gave him trouble, for the more pious among them complained because he had so much commerce with the Gentiles.

They did not dare say so to his face, for they could not overcome a certain awe in his presence. Not merely was he a haham, but, what with his dark, slit-like eyes gleaming from beneath pouched eyelids, and his narrow black beard jutting out fiercely from his chin, he was a most imposing personality. But if they hesitated to criticize him openly, they were able to reveal their dissatisfaction in an even more effective way. They simply underpaid him, and to such an extent that the poor man—he had a wife and three children to support—had to be forever looking about for additional sources of income.

One of his ventures was the establishment of a Hebrew printing press, the first in northern Europe; but though he brought out an admirable edition of the prayer-book and several other Hebrew works, he could make no profit by the business. He tried other ventures, but they, too, failed. Finally he began to think of leaving. In 1639, when his synagogue merged with the other two in the city, he saw that even his rabbinical office was no longer secure. He determined to move to Brazil, whither several hundred Dutch Jews, chiefly artisans, were just then planning to migrate, and where there was already a goodly settlement of former Maranos. He even hastened to dedicate a forthcoming book to the congregation out there. And only the sudden development of a new opening for him in Amsterdam kept him from going. He was offered a position in the yeshivah which was just being started, and, though the salary was not large, he was glad to accept. Another of the local rabbis, Isaac Aboab, accepted the call to Brazil. Manasseh remained behind—to become in time one of Baruch's teachers.

One wonders to what extent the boy was influenced by this Manasseh ben Israel. Certainly he must have been impressed by the man, especially during his first years in the yeshivah. Just how much Baruch saw of him we do not know, for Rabbi Morteira, too, was active in the yeshivah, and how he and his colleague divided the work between them is not recorded. The likelihood is that Manasseh did most of the actual teaching, and that Morteira served as a sort of overseer. The daily sessions were almost certainly conducted by the former, and Baruch, who no doubt attended regularly in his first years, must thus have been brought in very close contact with the man.

The sessions were devoted almost entirely to the Talmud, which was studied now with a thoroughness reaching to the farthest bounds of the marginal notes. Lucas, or whoever else it was who wrote that earliest biography of the philosopher, tells us that Baruch "read and re-read the Talmud"—but that is probably an exaggeration. The youth may have read through some portions many times, especially the gnomic *Pirke Aboth,* the "Ethics of the Fathers"; but to have mastered the entire Talmud in that way would have required half a lifetime. Printed with its more important commentaries, the work fills twelve folio volumes, and, because of the bewildering elisions, allusions, and abbreviations that stud the text from end to end, it often requires the better part of a day to master a single page. A tortuous logic pervades the work, and this, coupled with the cryptic terseness of the text, makes each line, each word, a riddle. There are, of course, many narrative passages in the Talmud: amazing legends, curious anecdotes, and disjointed fragments of history. But these were probably raced through in those sessions of the academy; only the legal portions were deemed worthy of careful discussion.

The method of study was probably like that pursued in most orthodox rabbinical academies to this day. The students were expected to prepare the day's "page" in advance of the session, and they usually performed the task in the synagogue after the morning service. Seated alone, or in groups of two or three, they would keep swaying over the huge folios and mumble to themselves till at last some glimpse of the meaning was vouchsafed to them. When the haham joined them at some time during the day, he would first go over the various passages that had baffled them, and then would call for a recitation of the entire page. That done, he himself would launch upon a casuistic disquisition, taking some isolated decision in the text as his starting point, and, with innumerable citations and incessant swooping of his right thumb, would derive from it a score of analogous decisions—and perhaps as many contradictory ones. It was a sort of sport, and yet it was indulged in with great seriousness. The students followed the rabbi's arguments with the rapt attention that the Christian youths of the age might have given to the thrusts and parries of their fencing-master. For among the Jews the ability to carry on a disquisition of that sort was considered the highest and almost the holiest of achievements.

In his own Sephardic community Manasseh ben Israel was probably considered a master at that art. He had a prodigious memory and could employ irrelevant quotations from obscure tractates and forgotten codes with a facility as dazzling as it was perhaps deceptive. And young Baruch must have been entranced. The subject-matter of the debate could have meant little to him; indeed, much of the time it must have been altogether beyond his comprehension. When it dealt with details of the prayer-service, or the holy-day rites, it did at least have some point. Even though the argument centered around why Rabbi Judah bar Haviva declared against the salting of radishes on the Sabbath, or elaborated on what Rabbi Nathan bar Abba said in the name of Rav concerning snuffing a wick on a festive day —even then the boy could at least see some relevance in the debate. But how could he grow excited over the minutiæ of the ancient sacrificial cult, or over the laws governing the fluctuations in the archaic calendar?

But he was not expected to be engrossed in the subject-matter; it was the method of debate that was considered cardinal. And in that Baruch must have revelled. The capacity for strenuous reasoning which so distinguished him when grown to manhood could hardly have been a belated development. It must have been in him even as a boy, endowing him with an alertness in following the Talmudic casuistry which probably made his teacher's eyes gleam with delight.

There was, however, far more than his cunning as a Talmudist to make Manasseh ben Israel seem a great man to Baruch. The haham appeared to know philosophy as well; not alone the writings of Maimonides and Crescas and Saadya, but also those of the Arab metaphysicians and the Christian scholastics. He understood Latin and Greek, and a number of modern languages. He seemed able to discourse on the most diverse learned subjects: physics, astronomy, history, geography, and mathematics. And that must have been most impressive to the boy. Thus far his reading had been confined almost entirely to Hebraica; yet he must already long have been aware that there were wider pastures—perhaps greener ones, too—outside that narrow field. And it may have been Manasseh ben Israel who first gave him a glimpse into those pastures.

But it could not have been more than a fleeting glimpse, and very probably a distorted one. The haham was not a savant. He had an enormous appetite for knowledge and a prodigious capacity for remembering what he had read; but he had small critical faculty. One can tell that from his addiction to the Kabala. He was forever groping in the phosphorescent light of a book called the *Zohar,* which was the chief storehouse of Kabalistic lore. All manner of dubious secrets were to be found in that strange document—the true nature of the Infinite, the history of the ten Divine Emanations which created man, the sociology of Heaven and the climatology of Hell, the structure of the soul and the course of its transmigrations, the way to read "profound mysteries" in the wrinkles and features of each human face, how to perform magic ablutions, how to calculate the date of the Messiah's arrival—all discussed at length and with the most elaborate vagueness. According to its own report, these secrets contained in the *Zohar* had all been revealed by God to Adam in Paradise, and had been received in turn—the word *kabal* literally means "to receive"—by an unbroken line of patriarchs, prophets, and other wise men worthy of the knowledge.

And Manasseh ben Israel, like countless other scholars, both Christian and Jewish, read the book with unalloyed credulity. The fact that the *Zohar* was supposed to have been set down in writing by a Palestinian rabbi in the second century, and yet quoted two verses of poetry written by Ibn Gabirol in the eleventh century, referred to the capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders in 1099 and to its recapture by the Saracens in 1187, and mentioned the comet which appeared at Rome in 1264—all that did not in the least shake his faith in the document. He swallowed it whole. The metaphysical emanations of which it spoke, the "trinities of triads" and "cosmic dualities"—these were as real to him as the hairs in his beard. Metatron the angel, Samael the demon, the "Heavenly Adam," the "Infernal Beast"—these were as alive in his world as the stadtholder or the king of Spain.

Manasseh's attitude was by no means exceptional. Morteira, too, believed in the Kabala, and so did most other rabbis in that day. Almost without exception they went clambering down into a chasm of superstition to bathe in the muddy mysticism trickling along its rock-strewn floor. As early as the second century B.C., the astute Ben Sira had declared in his *Book of Wisdom,* "Thou shalt have no commerce with the secret things"; but his adjuration had gone unheeded. The Jews had suffered too bitterly to be able to dispense with the Kabalistic delusion. It gave them comfort to believe that a wisdom was theirs which the Gentiles, for all their might, were deprived of. It made them feel superior. Kabalism was to the Jews like an anodyne, deadening their senses to the harshnesses of reality and leaving their souls free to exult.

After the unspeakable torments they had been made to endure in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, they had taken to that anodyne as never before. In happier circumstances, for instance in Spain under the Arabs, the Jews had dared rise up and reason; but now, bludgeoned by the Gentiles no matter where they turned, they could only grovel and wish. They wished, of course, for miracles—what hope was there for them in natural events?—and therefore they put such stock in the Kabala. For the gnostic lore was supposed to contain the secrets whereby miracles could be worked or prophesied. Did one want to know how to change lead into gold, or chicken-bane into magic poultices? The formulæ were all to be found somewhere in the *Zohar*. Or did one yearn to know when the Messiah would come? Lo, that above all was to be discovered there. Somewhere in that Aramaic swamp, hidden deep, they believed, in the tangled underbrush of numerology and symbols, lay the key to that most wondrous of all mysteries; and the poor folk were frantic in their craving to find it. Even amid the bustle of prosperous Amsterdam the Jews were obsessed with the Messianic hope, and the learned among them searched the esoteric writings with a passion as intense as it was futile. All the young men in the local yeshivah were expected to study those writings, and the majority of them did so with avidity. Indeed, the only one of Baruch's fellow-students to attain any fame in later years was a certain Moses Zacuto who became a most celebrated Kabalist.

In all likelihood, Baruch, too, succumbed for a time to the lure. He was but a lad when he was first initiated into the Kabala, and there was no one near to quicken doubts in his mind. There was no sympathy with anything smacking of skepticism in the little colony crowding the Jodenbuurt. On the contrary, despite all the wealth and culture and consequent religious indifference which characterized some of its members, the general atmosphere was one of intense bigotry. It was but natural under the circumstances. In the first place, the colony was made up largely of reverts from Catholicism, and the virus of the discarded faith was still strong in them. It revealed itself not merely in their synagogue ritual—in the solemn processions they made when they carried the holy scrolls from the ark to the reader's desk, and in the Gregorian chant which they used when intoning the prayer—but even more in their whole religious attitude. They were utterly rigid in their orthodoxy, adhering to the least detail of their ancient faith and order with a tenacity as pathetic as it was accountable. Hardly a one in that congregation but could tell of a kinsman who had been put to death for reaching toward that faith. Some of those now dwelling in the Jodenbuurt had themselves seen the inside of Inquisitorial dungeons. And year after year new fugitives arrived, hollow-eyed and maimed, with fresh tales of the torments their brethren still endured in Spain. Not for naught had the Maranos in Amsterdam chosen the phœnix as their symbol: their community had quite literally arisen from the flames. And now that the flames were no more, they were determined not to let the remnant be destroyed by dissension. Long ago they had learnt that whoever was not with them, was against them; and they had not forgotten the lesson. Therefore they would abide no heresy in their midst. Either one fell in with their hard-won faith, or else one got out.

That was made tragically plain in the way the colony once treated one of its members who did dare to question the faith. He was a man named Uriel Acosta, a Portuguese Marano who had been reared a strict Catholic and had risked the flight to Amsterdam solely in order to become a Jew. An enthusiast by nature, perhaps even a trifle unbalanced, he had imagined that in Holland he would find the veritable New Jerusalem, a city where his brethren lived as in Bible times, governing themselves altogether by the Five Books of Moses, and communing with God like the prophets. But when, soon after his arrival, he discovered his error, he refused to reconcile himself to it. He began to make loud complaint against what he called the "pharisaism" of the rabbis—circumcision had not relieved him of the terminology he had learnt in the Jesuit schools—and he even dared to show open disdain for certain of the most sacrosanct customs. And the other members of the colony were outraged. They had suffered too much for their religion to see it assailed by one of their own brethren. And, after repeated warnings, the elders of the synagogue excommunicated the man.

But that had not ended the affair. Infuriated by the persecution, Acosta wrote a vituperative brochure in defense of his opinions, and the rabbis, fearful lest the blasphemous document bring the whole Jewish community into disgrace, hastened to lodge a complaint against the man before the Amsterdam magistrates. Whereupon his book was ordered destroyed and he himself was fined. There was no way for him to appeal from the verdict. Acosta had to swallow his indignation and continue living in isolation in the hateful town. By the time Baruch was born, Acosta had already been an excommunicant fourteen years, and his spirit had begun to flag. He had ceased by then to cherish the sentimental bibliolatry which had led to his original break with the congregation. He had advanced from that to a form of Deistic free-thought, the crux of which was the belief that Judaism, like every other "revealed" religion, was but a corruption of a "natural" religion inborn in man. But that conviction gave him little comfort, for he had developed a desire to marry and settle down. Besides, all his wealth was invested with one of his brothers, and he had begun to fear he might be robbed of it if he remained an excommunicant any longer. So at last, after fifteen years, he became, as he himself put it, "an ape among apes," and set his signature to a grovelling recantation.

But before long it was discovered that, despite his recantation, Acosta was cynically neglecting the ritual laws; and then he was once again at odds with the community. His marriage was prevented by his own relatives, and an attempt was even made to deprive him of his inheritance because of his impiety. Finally he was again excommunicated, and this time he was not merely shunned by the Jews, but actively persecuted.

He was spat upon when he appeared in the streets, urchins broke the windows, and threw offal and dead cats into his house. He became a sort of bogey in the neighborhood: children were terrified into docility with the threat that he would come and snatch them away.

Yet he held out seven long years before he again capitulated. By then he was already a man of fifty, and broken completely in will. Never very clear in his thinking, his mind had become altogether a chaos. All he wanted was an end to the hate and contumely to which he had so long been subjected. So he sent word to the authorities that he was ready to repent once more.

There was great agitation in the synagogue. According to the spirit of the Holy Law, public penances were not approved of. It was counted enough if the sinner confessed his transgressions in silence to God. But the leaders of the Amsterdam congregation felt that Acosta was not deserving to get off so lightly. They deliberated long and earnestly, and finally drew up a form of penance modelled largely on that which they had seen used in the churches in Spain. The wretched man was clad in a shroud and taken to the synagogue, where, in the presence of the assembled congregation, he was made to read out his confession of sins: that he had desecrated the Sabbath, violated the dietary laws, and had spoken derisively of the whole faith. In a broken voice he solemnly swore never again to be guilty of such offences, but to live as a true and observant Jew. Then, at a word from the chief of the rabbis—probably Saul Morteira

—the man was led to a corner of the synagogue, stripped to the waist, and made to bend his back to receive the lash. Three times the rabbi repeated a certain verse from one of the Psalms, and, as he pronounced each of the thirteen words in the verse, the sexton laid on with the scourge. And when the "one less than forty" stripes had thus been administered, Acosta was ordered to sit on the ground and listen while the ban was at last lifted. Then finally he was led to the door and made to lie prone on the threshold while the entire congregation walked over him out of the synagogue!

It was too much for the already half-crazed man. Perhaps the rabbis congratulated themselves on their mercy, for the Catholic authorities in a like case would certainly have put the culprit to death. But to Acosta it seemed that death would have been almost preferable to the humiliation he had been made to endure. He returned to his house in a frenzy, his only desire to avenge himself on those most responsible for his sufferings. He sat down and wrote out an impassioned account of all he had endured, and then loaded two pistols and sat in wait till he saw his worst enemy, a close kinsman, pass by the house. He fired, and missed. And then, realizing it was the end, he slammed the door, turned the other pistol on himself, and blew out his brains. . . .

Baruch was a boy of eight when Acosta put an end to his miserable life. Whether he witnessed the revolting humiliation in the synagogue, is not known,* but even if he did not, he must have heard tell of the incident. One imagines that for years thereafter the pious ones in the Jodenbuurt took secret delight in mulling over the whole Acosta affair. The man's shameful death seemed to justify their own lives. It proved conclusively that they were right to adhere to the faith: only misfortune could come of doubting. And with such a spirit pervading the ghetto, it is hardly to be wondered at if Baruch was credulous in his youth. He was, from all indications, a docile lad—quick-witted, studious, but not in the least intransigent. He learnt what he was taught, learnt it well and thoroughly. He did not balk, one suspects, even at the *Zohar*. He, like his elders, probably swallowed it whole, seeing none of the absurdity in its fantastic erudition. Why should he? He was still hardly more than a child.

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* Berthold Auerbach, whose novel entitled *Spinoza* enjoyed considerable popularity a generation or two ago—it appeared in English in 1882—opens his narrative with a description of Baruch's emotions during the funeral of Acosta. The author did not suspect the anachronism because he thought the event occurred in 1647 instead of 1640.

CHAPTER IV

BUT gradually, imperceptibly, a change came over him. He grew—but in mind rather than in body. And with that growth a disturbing light crept up through the mists in his young head. For some inexplicable reason he began to doubt certain of the things he was taught. The doubts may have been quite faint at first, no more than vague misgivings. But they did arise, and they would not leave. Things which he had taken for granted until then, which all the Jodenbuurt took for granted, began unaccountably to seem questionable to his mind. Perhaps it was the imbecile extravagance of certain of the teachings in the *Zohar* that first aroused his skepticism; or perhaps it was the preposterousness of certain notions in the Talmud. He did not tell, either then or later; so we do not know. All we can be sure of is that he did become skeptical.

One wonders how, in such an atmosphere, the boy ever became capable of such a reaction. Was he innately sharper of mind than the others in the yeshivah? Or was it the circumstance that he had never been engulfed by the world, that he had been almost from infancy an outsider looking in—was it this that endowed him with his extraordinary acuteness? Here again we are at a loss to know. But, if we are to believe Lucas, the trait was apparently already manifest in Baruch when he was no more than a lad. It happened—so says this biographer—that when Baruch was about ten he was once sent by his father to collect a debt from an old woman in the quarter. On entering her house Baruch found the Jewess reading the Bible, and when, after waiting for her to finish her pious exercise, he told her his errand, she lost no time in counting out the money.

"Here is what I owe your father," the good woman declared, pointing to the heap of coins. "May you some day be as righteous as he, for never has he departed from the Law of Moses; and Heaven will bless you according as you follow after him."

But when the woman, having made that disarming speech, snatched up the money and tried to thrust it into the boy's purse, he became suspicious. Having observed, says Lucas, that the crone had "all the marks of false piety," Baruch wanted to count the money for himself. The woman assured him it was quite unnecessary, but the boy persisted. And when at last he did count the coins, he found two ducats missing. The sanctimonious old crone had dropped them into a drawer through a slit especially cut in the top of the table!

The story has a rather hollow ring, yet there is no absolute reason for rejecting it as completely apocryphal. One may well believe that Baruch even as a child revealed an inordinate astuteness. And that trait remained in him, developing as he grew, and suddenly cropping out in a persistent interrogativeness. Lucas tells us that the young yeshivah student began to "raise difficulties which the most learned among the Jews found it hard to solve"; and that "although such extreme youth is hardly the age of understanding, still he had enough of it to perceive that his doubts embarrassed his teacher." But the student did not exult in this, or grow impertinent. On the contrary, "being afraid to irritate [his teacher,] he pretended to be very satisfied with his answers." It was not cowardice that prompted Baruch to such a course, for, as will soon be very evident, there was nothing of the coward in him. Rather it was an inherent prudence. Born into a family of erstwhile Maranos, he had imbibed discretion with his mother's milk. From the very cradle he had been taught to be circumspect. So he did not argue. Instead he returned to his books.

But those books only multiplied his doubts. It was inevitable, seeing the character of the works to which he turned. There was, for instance, the Bible commentary by old Ibn Ezra, to all outward seeming a most pious work, and yet, to the discerning eye, one replete with heresies. Abraham Ibn Ezra—the same whom Browning called Rabbi Ben Ezra and made the mouthpiece for his own Victorian optimism—was one of the most brilliant and tragic products of the "Golden Age" in Spain. He was born in Tudela in 1097, and, though learned in all the sciences of his time, and unbelievably prolific, he was poverty-stricken and without a home almost all his days. A persistent lucklessness dogged him no matter to what he turned. As he himself declared, were he to take to peddling candles, the sun would never set; or were he to trade in shrouds, then men would cease to die. He wandered everywhere: from Spain to Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, the borders of India, North Africa, Italy, France, England—indeed, at the age of seventy-five, when he died, he was still wandering. Yet somehow he managed to produce more than a hundred learned works, chief among them a vast commentary on the Bible.

Ibn Ezra's commentary never became as popular as the one by Rashi, for it was far more erudite and far less lively. Its primary emphasis was on grammar, which to Ibn Ezra seemed the one key to the Bible. He scorned the preposterous allegorizing and preaching resorted to by all other scholarly commentators, both Jewish and Christian. His first aim was to examine each individual word in the Holy Writ, giving its derivation and grammatical construction; and on the basis of that examination he sought to interpret each verse. His purpose, in fine, was to be scientific. He was far from successful, of course. At times he, too, resorted to allegorizing. And quite often he wandered off into quite irrelevant diatribes, or into prolix digressions on abstruse details. Worse still, when his probing with the scalpel of textual analysis threatened to uncover too much, he lost courage and took refuge in evasion. The wise old scholar seems to have detected certain facts about the Holy Writ which are today among the commonplaces of Bible criticism: for instance, that the last twenty-seven chapters of the book of Isaiah could not have been written by the Palestinian prophet, but must have been the product of someone living in Babylon during the Exile; and that certain of the Psalms were not Davidic but of much later origin. Most startling of all, he apparently detected discrepancies even in the Five Books of Moses! But he never came out plainly on these points. When he noticed, for example, that the Pentateuch contained the expression, "the Canaanite was *then* in the land," he did not state the obvious conclusion that whoever wrote those words must have lived after the Canaanites had disappeared, and therefore centuries after Moses was dead and buried. Instead, he remarked: "There is in this a mystery, and let him who comprehends be silent."

Perhaps it was as well that Ibn Ezra resorted to such evasions, for otherwise his commentary would certainly have been suppressed. As it was, the work became part of accepted rabbinic literature, and was printed in almost all the variorum editions of the Bible used in Jewish circles. Baruch began to study it as a matter of course, and at first he may have been quite blind to the real character of the work. But after a while his suspicions began to be aroused. His mind, unlike the minds of the others in the yeshivah, was attracted to the discipline of grammar. He liked it because it dealt with concepts that could be defined and classified, with clear, precise facts that could be nailed down and securely built upon. Therefore he was more painstaking in his study of Ibn Ezra's commentary than were his colleagues, devoting himself to it with uncommon zeal. And the more he studied it, the sharper grew his suspicions. With his preternatural acuteness he saw through the sly circumlocutions in the work. He became convinced that Ibn Ezra had discovered pitfalls that were not to be evaded with a mere phrase.

It must have terrified him. Ibn Ezra forced him to doubt the validity of the entire tradition of Israel! The corner-stone of that tradition was the Divine Torah, the Five Books of Moses; and if that stone could be proved to be flawed, then the whole structure was awry. It was an awful thought. What could be true if even the Pentateuch was false? And false it must be if even one word in it, one letter, could be shown to be other than divine. There could not be a more or a less about revelation; it *was* or it *was not*. Either the Torah, upon which all Judaism rested, was literally and verbally inspired by God, or——

Baruch could not bring himself to utter the alternative. It was too devastating. And yet, unspoken though it might be, he could not banish it from his mind. There was a relentlessness about that mind of his: once it was set on what seemed the path of logic, it could not be stayed or swerved. And the worst of it was that Baruch had no one to whom to turn for counsel. His father was, of course, out of the question; the good man would have trembled at the very broaching of the possibility of a doubt. And the rabbis were little better.

There had once been a haham in the community who might have understood Baruch's perplexity, an eccentric, wild-eyed Levantine named Joseph Delmedigo. He had been educated in Italy, where he had come under the influence of Galileo and other advanced thinkers; and in the course of his erratic career he had been a lecturer on mathematics in Egypt, an astronomer in Turkey, the personal physician to a prince in Poland, and eventually a rabbi in Amsterdam. In his convictions, too, he had been no less erratic, now defending the traditional faith, and now penning caustic attacks on it. At one time he had even committed himself to complete disbelief in the Talmud. Had he remained in Amsterdam until Baruch grew up, he might have been able to understand and advise the youth. But the man had moved on after a brief and stormy stay in the city, and was now somewhere in Germany or Bohemia. If the student knew of him at all it was only through his published writings—two of them were found in Spinoza's library when he died—and these could have only intensified his bewilderment.

The rabbis now living in Amsterdam were men of a different character, less uncertain of their opinions, and for that reason less understanding. When at times Baruch did dare approach them with perplexing questions, they could only answer him—at least, so avers the hostile Lucas—"after the manner of ignoramuses who, when they see their argument exhausted, charge that those who press them so furiously are naught save heretics."

Nor, so far as we know, did Baruch have any layman to whom to turn. The Sephardic Jewish community consisted of some two thousand souls at this time—just about the number of Jews living at present in San Diego, California, or Tampa, Florida—and there was exceedingly little variety of religious opinion. There were, it is true, a number in the settlement who were known to be lax in their religious life; but their transgressions were prompted by indifference rather than definite disbelief. Only one of them, a certain Juan da Prado, seems to have been an exception in the latter regard, but even he was not very earnest in his heterodoxy. We know very little about him, and that little from the writings of his enemies. He was apparently a young merchant in the city, a dark, pock-marked fellow who had left his native Spain not because of religious persecution, but rather because of the economic depression which had set in there. Once settled in the "New Jerusalem," however, he had followed the example of the other refugees and had returned to the faith of his ancestors. But, having been educated under the influence of certain Renaissance free-thinkers at the University of Toledo, he found the orthodoxy of the Amsterdam community unendurable. Among other things, Da Prado could not believe that there was a God who gave revelations and worked providential miracles. Being by his own boast an enlightened and emancipated man, he could believe only in Nature and its immutable laws.

And, knowing that he was far from Spain and the Inquisition, Da Prado saw no reason for concealing his opinions. He actually discussed them publicly, especially in the taverns frequented by the gayer young Jews of the town. He was never as outspoken as poor Uriel Acosta had been—he was far less exercised over the whole matter of belief—but even so he incensed the devout folk. The pious poetaster, Daniel Levi de Barrios, to whose dull but determined Muse we are indebted for much of our knowledge of Jewish life during the period, calls Da Prado a "captain of blasphemies . . . a seducer of women who had no more religion than was pleasing to his body!"

That is why one can hardly imagine any intimacy between Baruch and that man. Da Prado was evidently a libertine in the modern as well as the seventeenth century meaning of the word; and the quiet, sober, moral young Talmudist lived in another world from him.

So there was nothing left for Baruch save to keep his doubts to himself. There was no one within his narrow Jewish world in whom he could confide; and, being so young, and a student in the yeshivah, he could hardly go seeking such a one among the Gentiles. He had to be silent, hoping almost against hope that his doubts would leave him in time. One can picture him as he must have appeared in those days: a frail, dark, curly-haired youth forever swaying over some book in a shadowed corner of the synagogue. Perhaps he paid little heed to the other students scattered about the room, for his quest was not theirs and he knew it. He sat alone in his corner, his large eyes staring to make out the text, his full lips moving incessantly. The air in the place was heavy with the stale odor of the congregations gathering there three times a day; but he was unaware of that. He was unaware of anything save the bewilderment in his mind. It was as though a thorn were there, a merciless goad which would not let him rest. And he groaned for a way to be rid of it. He was, to borrow one of his own similes, "like a sick man struggling with a mortal disease, who, seeing that death will surely be upon him unless he find a remedy, is forced to seek it with all his might." He could not endure the doubts that gnawed at his faith. He had to find an answer to them, a complete and incontestible answer. For until he found it, he knew himself lost.

The years passed, but no answer revealed itself. He searched for it in the Bible, the Commentaries, the Talmud, the Kabala; but still it eluded him. Indeed, the more he searched, the farther it seemed from his grasp.

Even when he began to read in the books of the great philosophers, he was still unable to find it. His teachers had many such books, and they set great store by them. Some were in Latin and Greek, but these in all likelihood they did not show to Baruch. He was still a youth, and the rabbis felt he should first read the books in Hebrew. After all, what truth was there in the writings of Gentiles that was not to be found better said in the writings of Jews?

Baruch did not murmur at the restriction. He was still unacquainted with Latin and Greek, and for the present there were more than enough philosophic works in Hebrew to occupy him. There was Saadya's *Dogma and Science,* Ibn Pakuda's *Duties of the Heart,* Ibn Gabirol's *Fountain of Life,* Judah Halevi's *Kuzari,* Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed,* Gersonides' *Wars of the Lord,* Crescas's *Light of the Lord,* and Abarbanel's *Dialogues of Love.* The books dated from the ninth to the fifteenth century, and though some of them had been written originally in Arabic and most showed the influence of Pagan and Arab thought, they had all earned the imprimatur of the rabbis. Unhappily, they were no longer as popular as they had once been in learned Jewish circles; they had been supplanted by the Kabalistic writings. But they were still greatly revered and occasionally studied. If Baruch showed an interest in such literature, his teachers saw no reason to discourage it. On the contrary, they took pride that one of their disciples should reveal such precocity, and they, no doubt, let him devote all his hours to those books.

He must have been no more than sixteen or so when he first began to wrestle with philosophy. The discipline was rigorous, for the terms were strange and the ideas were often beyond comprehension. But Baruch had a prodigious mind and his patience was inexhaustible. Despite the difficulties—and even to his seniors they were largely insuperable—he persevered in the study. What most kindled his ardor, one imagines, was that he saw in those writings an understanding of his own doubts. Those philosophers had all of them been aware of the seeming conflict between faith and reason, and each in turn had tried valiantly to resolve it.

Moses Maimonides most of all had wrestled with that problem, and his ripest work, the *Guide for the Perplexed,* seems to have interested Baruch profoundly. Maimonides, who was born in Spain in 1135, had lived all his life under the influence of Arab enlightenment. He had known not alone the traditional lore—he was called the "second Moses" because of his colossal Talmudic learning—but also the science of the day. And his great passion had been to prove these two disciplines, one rooted in faith and the other in reason, to be fundamentally harmonious. Having drunk deep of the polluted Aristotle which eddied in the Moslem academies in that age, he had tried to keep his Mosaic stomach from expelling the alien stuff. And by dint of much straining he had succeeded. He had concluded that the doctrines of religion were simply the teachings of science expressed in language comprehensible to the common man. That was the central thesis of his *Guide for the Perplexed.* He attempted to show in that book that all the essentials of Aristotelian philosophy are to be discovered in the Hebrew Bible. Not on the surface, of course. No, the Bible was written for the populace, and therefore its profounder truths are clothed in imagery or concealed in allegory. For example: Aristotle taught that man was composed of three elements: vegetable, animal, and intellectual. But does not the Bible teach precisely the same doctrine when it declares that Adam had three sons? . . .

Baruch may have been quite disarmed by that line of reasoning—for a time. Older men than he, and far more erudite, had been accepting it during the past four centuries. Those who had rejected it had done so only because they had deemed *all* reasoning blasphemous. (The obscurantists in the synagogue had at one time actually persuaded the Dominican inquisitors to have the *Guide for the Perplexed* publicly burned in the streets of Paris!) But at least the enlightened scholars, those at all capable of perplexity, had fairly generally followed the guidance of Moses ben Maimon. Not alone Jewish scholars; Christian ones, too. The very greatest of the scholastics, men like Albertus Magnus, Duns Scotus, and Thomas Aquinas, are now known to have expounded ideas which were obviously—though not often admittedly—derived from him whom they knew only as "Rabbi Moyses Aegyptius." *

If Baruch was won over, however, it was not for long. Maimonides had expounded his doctrine with titanic erudition and astounding cunning; yet the youngster in the Amsterdam ghetto did see through it after a while. Not through the doctrine itself, but at least through the exposition. The idea that religion inculcates in unthinking people the moral ideals which the reflective attain through philosophy—that Baruch Spinoza continued to believe. Indeed, he still adhered to it twenty years later, when he wrote his revolutionary *Treatise on Theology and Politics.*† But the allegorical exegesis by which Maimonides sought to read Aristotle into the Bible—that, as Baruch later declared, impressed him as "the acme of absurdity." His mind was too sharp to be turned by such sophistry. He had already studied Ibn Ezra, and he knew that only by means of stark grammatical exegesis could the Bible ever be validly interpreted.

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* See Guttman, *Das Verhältniss der Thomas Aquina zum Judenthum,* 1891, p. 31 *et seq.;* and Joël, *Verhältniss Albert des Grossen zu Moses Maimonides,* 1863.

† Manuel Joël, one of the pioneers in the field of Spinozistic criticism, is of the opinion that the earlier part of that treatise could never have been written had it not been for the *Guide for the Perplexed.* (*Spinozas theologisch-politischer Traktat auf seine Quellen Geprüft,* Breslau, 1870, pp. 9-10.) And Leon Roth, one of the most illuminating of contemporary investigators, goes so far as to declare: "It would appear that Spinoza's study of Maimonides controlled his later thought in the sense that unconsciously he tested whatever came to his hand in accordance with the principles which he had learned once for all in the *Guide.* (*Spinoza, Descartes, and Maimonides,* Oxford, 1924, pp. 104-5.)

So now Baruch was more deeply mired in doubt than before. His study of Maimonides, far from guiding him out of his perplexity, simply confirmed him in it. It made clear to him how profound, how apparently irreconcilable, was the conflict between religion and reason. And his study of the other philosophers, Saadya, Gersonides, Crescas, and the rest, made this realization only the clearer. For he saw that these philosophers had fared no better than had the great Moses ben Maimon. Their demonstrations of the chasm between faith and science were consummate; but their attempts to bridge the chasm were vain. At least, so it appeared to Baruch. And as a consequence, the more he studied the writings of the philosophers, the more difficult he found it to accept the rabbinic faith. The clear little flame of reason waxed in his mind, fighting back the darkness in which authority and credulity had their lairs. He began to question more and more of the doctrinal teachings which those about him took for granted. For instance, he began to wonder whether they were right in their belief that God was a being removed from the earth. According to what he read in Gersonides, it was only rational to concede that matter is as eternal as spirit. Did it not then follow that Eternal God must be present in matter as well as spirit, and that He must therefore exist on earth as well as in heaven? . . . Or again, it was part of orthodox belief that God is angered if man transgresses the Holy Law? But, as Crescas made clear, all effects have causes, and these causes can be traced ultimately to an inescapable First Cause. Obviously, therefore, whatever happens in the universe is absolutely determined in advance by God who is that First Cause. How, then, can He be so illogical as to give way to anger if man falls into sin? . . .

Such were the problems with which Baruch's mind grappled as he sat and pored over his books all day long. His behavior, one may suppose, was as it had always been—exemplary. Despite all the doubts that swirled in his young head, he was never moved to neglect the ritual. He still prayed punctiliously three times each day; he still kept the Mosaic diet; he still observed the Sabbath laws. To have done otherwise would have been as difficult as to stop breathing. *Na'aseh v'nishmah,* the Hebrews had promised when Moses offered them the Commandments: "We shall do and we shall hear!" The peculiar phrasing of the promise was significant, said the rabbis. First Israel keeps the Commandments, and then it argues about them. And there was more truth than homily in that comment. It was one thing for a Jew to question the Holy Law, but quite another for him to transgress it. Baruch's head may have ached with doubts, but he still girded it with a phylactery each week-day morning. . . .

And because the young man continued to act so piously, none suspected what he was thinking. For years

—perhaps until he was almost twenty—he continued to keep his doubts a secret. He may have interposed a question now and again when Morteira or Manasseh ben Israel conducted the seminar sessions. Or on occasion he may have come to them privately with a difficulty. But, so far as we know, he never frankly expressed his real feelings. "Men's common failing," he was one day to write, "is that though there be need of secrecy, they confide their thoughts in others. Not even the most experienced, to say nothing of the common folk, know how to keep silent." He himself, however, was free from that failing. Perhaps it was the Marano in him—he knew well how to keep his thoughts secret. And his elders, seeing how studious he was and how modestly and quietly he comported himself, rejoiced in the thought that such a youth was in their midst. They were sure he would grow up to be an ornament to their community, as pious as his father, and phenomenally learned to boot. By then they must have begun to take it for granted that the young man would become a rabbi, for both his talents and apparent character patently fitted him for that office. And, so far as we know, Baruch said nothing to disabuse them on that score. Perhaps he, too, thought he would end by becoming a rabbi.

What else was there for him to become? A merchant? That, of course, would have been the more logical choice—had he been an ordinary young Jew in Amsterdam. And there was perhaps a good opening for him in his own father's business, especially after 1649, when Isaac, the only other son in the family, passed away. But Baruch plainly had no head for business. He was quiet and unaggressive, a lover of books rather than profits. . . . What other calling, then, was there for him to follow? He could not become a lawyer, for he was a Jew. Nor, for the same reason, could he hope for a career in the universities. . . . He might, of course, become a physician, for there were no religious restrictions in that profession, and he was already somewhat educated in the field. (In those days medicine was learned out of books rather than in clinics, and the rabbinical writings contained almost all that was then known of the art.) But the practice of medicine apparently had no appeal for him.

What was left, therefore, save the rabbinate? True, he had never experienced any supernatural "call" to go laboring in the Lord's vineyard; but who had, among the Jews? It was long before the days of the "Reform Movement" in Judaism, and the ideals of the Protestant Church had not yet been imported into the Synagogue. A rabbi was still an authority on the ritual, not an evangelist; his primary qualification was still learning, not mystic consecration. Of course, he could never become a fit teacher of the Holy Law if he himself did not believe in it. But for the present he *did* believe in it—almost. True, he had certain misgivings; but he could not possibly suppose that they would last. Judaism, he had been taught, was the most ancient faith on earth. It had commanded the devotion of men far wiser and more learned than he. His own ancestors had surrendered their homes and gone wandering in beggary rather than forsake the faith. In this very Jodenbuurt there lived men and women who had braved rack and stake for it. Surely, therefore, it must be proof against his doubts. If he continued to be plagued by suspicions, then he himself, not the faith, was at fault. He had not studied enough, that was all. . . .

So, being in love with learning, still observant of the ritual, and convinced that his present doubts would soon be gone, Baruch could see no reason for leaving the yeshivah. To remain there meant, of course, that he must continue to live off his father; but the latter seems not to have demurred at that. Michael Despinoza was not a rich man, and the fates had been none too kind to him of late. But he was still unwavering in his piety. He had just given the hand of his younger daughter, Miriam, to a student in the yeshivah—which probably meant he had an added mouth to feed. (The son-in-law had no parents of his own to support him.) But the merchant was probably glad and proud of his burdens. The death of his son, Isaac, in 1649, may have left him the sole bread-winner for the large household. And he may have been poor in health, for the following year, when the banns of his daughter's marriage were recorded, he was not able even to be present.* But so far as we know he only rejoiced that he was supporting a son as well as a son-in-law through the yeshivah.

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* The archives state that "Michael d'Espinose, the father, has given his consent to this marriage," but mention only the step-mother as

This son-in-law was a young man named Samuel de Caseres, and from all indications he was not at all like Baruch in his cast of mind. Eventually he did become a rabbi, and when he died at the early age of thirty-two, his epitaph read: "Poet, Preacher, Cantor, and Translator of the Holy Scriptures." One cannot imagine, therefore, that there was much intimacy between him and the young doubter who was his brother-in-law. For that matter, one cannot imagine that there was much intimacy between any of the other students and Baruch. They must all have been more or less credulous youths, earnest, studious, but quite slavishly orthodox. The subsequent career of one of them, Moses Zacuto, reveals quite glaringly what may have been the prevailing temper in their circle. This Moses Zacuto, after having learned all he could of Hebrew lore in Amsterdam, went on to Poland to learn more; and when he finally settled down as a rabbi and a teacher of the Kabala in Italy, he was apparently quite unbalanced in his piety. Consumed with remorse because he had once learnt Latin, he is said to have fasted forty days and forty nights in the hope that the abominable knowledge might be swept from his mind. And Isaac Naar, the only other of Baruch's fellow-students who is known to us by more than name, lived to become one of the most gullible

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having been present. Gebhardt, *Spinoza, Lebensbeschreibungen und Gespräche,* 1914, p. 126.

supporters of that Levantine mountebank, Sabbatai Zevi, who gave himself out as the Messiah in the 1660's.

Baruch with his passion for rationality could have had little in common with such young men. However, he may not have been distressed by that, for, though far from a misanthrope, he was by nature not especially gregarious. Perhaps he even preferred to keep to himself during these years of inward confusion. Lucas says of him that as a student "truth was so very much his ruling passion that he scarcely saw anybody." That may well be true. His aloofness, no doubt, caused some adverse comment, but not on the part of his teachers. Manasseh ben Israel, for one, was so preoccupied with other concerns that he may not have even noticed any strangeness in Baruch's conduct. The haham had just written a pamphlet entitled *Esperança de Israel*—dedicated, incidentally, to the congregational board of trustees of which Baruch's father was a member—which gave the Biblical and Rabbinic proofs for the imminence of the Messiah's coming. The pamphlet had already been translated and published in England, where it had aroused considerable excitement; and Manasseh was busily seeking to press his advantage. His ambition at the moment was to see the Jews re-admitted to England, and he knew he had a chance to realize that ambition now that Cromwell and his bibliolatrous followers were in power there. Manasseh's most telling argument was that according to Scripture the advent of the Messiah would accomplish the ingathering of the Jews from "*all* the countries"—which, of course, implied that they would first have to be *scattered* to all the countries. It followed, therefore, that unless the Jews were admitted into England, the Messiah could not possibly make his appearance! . . . Such reasoning seemed flawless to the Puritan "saints" in Parliament, and their response encouraged Manasseh to continue his agitation. He became obsessed with the notion that he was the instrument of Providence appointed to help prepare the way for Israel's redemption; and he kept up an incessant correspondence with pastors, politicians, and whoever else showed interest in his cause. And such activities so absorbed Manasseh that he could hardly have found time to concern himself over a yeshivah student.

It was otherwise with Rabbi Morteira, who devoted all his time and thought to his own flock; but if he remarked Baruch's inclination to keep to himself, he apparently saw no fault in it. On the contrary the rabbi "found nothing to criticize in his conduct and character of mind," says Lucas, and "was only amazed that a young man of such penetration should be so modest."

But his fellow-students, it would seem, felt differently about Baruch. Perhaps they resented his aloofness from them; or perhaps they were envious of his repute in the community. Whatever the cause, they began to regard him with suspicion. Not that he was lax in piety or loose in morals. From all indications he was a model young man so far as such things were concerned. But they did not like his peculiar secretiveness. They became convinced that he was concealing something, and finally some of them took it upon themselves to find out what it was.

Lucas reports a specific incident which appears quite credible. He says that at some time or other two of Baruch's fellow-students came to him and tried to draw him out on certain questions. "They represented to him," says the biographer, "that whatever his opinions might be, he had nothing to fear from them, for their curiosity had no other object than to clear up their own doubts." Baruch, however, was reluctant to confide in them, and, when they persisted, sought to evade their questions by saying that they need only consult the Scriptures for the proper answers. They would not be put off, however. If Moses and the Prophets are the final authority, one of them asked, then what ground was there for the rabbinic belief that God is incorporeal, or that the soul is immortal, or that angels are real beings? No one of these ideas is to be found in the Jewish Scriptures. "How does it appear to you?" the young men are reported to have demanded of Baruch: "Has God a body? Are there any angels? Is the soul indeed immortal?"

Questioned so directly, Baruch could no longer take refuge in evasion. "I confess," he answered,

> "that since the Bible does not speak of the non-material or the incorporeal, I can perceive no valid objection to

> the belief that God has a body. . . . As for angels, it is certain that Scripture does not say they are real and permanent substances, but mere phantoms . . . which is why we cannot truly believe in angels. . . . And as for the soul . . . it would be vain to search for a single passage in support of its immortality." . . .

Now that was tantamount to heresy. The incorporeality of God was one of the cardinal doctrines of the synagogue, and Maimonides had declared that those who did not accept it would have no share in the World to Come.* Any tyro in rabbinics knew the exegetical methods by which the Biblical descriptions of God, despite their blatant anthropomorphism, had been made to sustain that dogma. . . . As for the angels, to deny their reality meant to discredit the whole Kabala, for in it they were the sole means by which man could gain the grace of Heaven. Indeed, the all-absorbing concern of most Kabalists was to discover more and more angels—texts like the *Book of Raziel* listed hundreds of them—for it was firmly believed that one need merely utter their names for them to come at once and do one's bidding. . . . And as for the immortality of the soul: not since the time of the ancient Sadducees had any sect in Israel dared to declare that doctrine unscriptural. Baruch had betrayed himself into rank blasphemy, and perhaps only the hope that he might betray himself even more kept the two spies from informing on him at once. They left him for the time being, assuring him,

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* *Mishneh Torah,* Teshubah, iii, 7.

Supposed portrait of Spinoza as a youth.

however, that they would soon return, for the problem was "too important to be merely touched on."

But Baruch would not let himself be cornered a second time. He became convinced that there was no good motive behind the curiosity of those two fellows, and he carefully avoided them thenceforth. Whereupon reports Lucas,

> "they vowed to take revenge . . . and began to say that . . . Rabbi Morteira was mistaken in having a good opinion of him, and that the people deceived themselves in believing that [Baruch] might become one of the pillars of the synagogue . . . for he was impious . . . and had nothing but hatred and contempt for the Law of Moses."

Such slanders could not long remain secret, for the whole Jodenbuurt was a close place where the least whisper carried like a shout. Eventually they reached the ears of the authorities, and then there must have been a scene. Lucas reports that Baruch was at once arraigned before the rabbinical court, and, after an exchange of sharp words, was publicly denounced; but the biographer is almost certainly in error there. As Dunin-Borkowski has shown, the episode of the two spies, if it is not altogether apocryphal, probably occurred when Baruch was still no more than nineteen or twenty.* At that time his father was still alive, and was one of the leading personages in the congregation. So if the gossip ever did come to the attention of the rabbis, in all likelihood it was promptly hushed up. Perhaps

* *Der Junge de Spinoza,* p. 248.

Rabbi Morteira called Baruch aside and, after catechizing him a while, frowningly adjured him henceforth to be less presumptuous in his thinking. Rabbi Manasseh, too, may have cautioned him. And, of course, his own father must have put in a worried word.

But that was all that happened—then.

CHAPTER V

THUS far our advance has been hesitant and uncertain. At every turn we have had to falter and give warning that our trail is only "possibly" or "probably" or "in all likelihood" correct. That is because until now we have had no better chart to go by than that incoherent little biography attributed to Jean Maximilien Lucas. Save for that, and a few scattered clues unearthed by recent investigators, we have had to trust to sheer surmise. But from here on our path becomes a little less uncertain, for we have a second chart, the biography by Colerus, to guide us. It is by no means a clear chart, nor complete, nor sure; but at least it is an improvement on that provided by Lucas.

Johann Köhler, or Colerus, was a pious and not over-brilliant Lutheran pastor who chanced to occupy the very lodgings in which Spinoza had lived when he moved to The Hague almost thirty years earlier. The philosopher was by then a half-legendary character in the neighborhood, both because of the reputed wickedness of his opinions and the remembered saintliness of his life; and Colerus became interested in him. He made inquiries of those who had known Spinoza, especially of one of his parishioners, a Mr. Van der Spyck, in whose house the philosopher had spent the last six years of his life. This Van der Spyck, apparently a somewhat garrulous soul, was right glad to grow reminiscent about his former lodger, for he and his family had loved the man dearly, and still revered his memory. But, save for a few details and a rumor or two, the landlord knew almost nothing of Spinoza's youth. Nor could the others whom Colerus consulted supply any information on that period. Lucas was apparently less unsuccessful in that direction, and his sketch contains a number of anecdotes —all garbled, no doubt—which do throw some light on Spinoza's early years. That is why in our progress thus far we have had to make so much use of Lucas. But now at last we can begin to refer to Colerus, for from this point on he grows less uninformative. He, too, is far from adequate as a guide, for he knows only little of trail, and that little he learnt at second hand. But at least he is cautious and within limits dependable.*

Colerus seems to have had no knowledge of Baruch's long schooling in the synagogue. He opens his account with the statement:

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* His biographical essay first appeared in 1705 as an appendix to a turgid treatise entitled *On the True Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead, defended against Spinoza and his followers.* An English translation of the essay—done out of a French version of the Dutch original—was published in London only a year later, and is to be found reprinted in Pollock's *Spinoza.* It is this archaic translation that will be used when quoting Colerus here, for it is sufficiently accurate and has the added merit of quaintness.

> "*Spinoza,* that Philosopher whose name makes so great noise in the World, was originally a *Jew.*"

But when, in the next paragraph, he proceeds to tell of Baruch's education, he begins by saying that "because he had a great Mind to learn the *Latin* Tongue," he was sent to a German master to receive instruction in the language. That could hardly have happened, however, before Baruch was eighteen or nineteen. All the advanced students in the yeshivah were expected to learn Latin, for among the occidental Sephardim it was the fashion for the rabbis to know something of the "priests' language." Baruch's own father, like many another untutored elder, may have questioned the wisdom of that fashion. After all, what was the worth of such Gentile learning? The little that was good in it was stolen from the Jews, was it not? And the rest —pooh! fit only for idolators and fools! . . . But the authorities of the yeshivah felt otherwise. If Baruch was to become a haham, then it was imperative that he be conversant with secular as well as sacred lore. And their opinion in such matters was law.

We do not know who was this German from whom Baruch received his first lessons in Latin. It has been conjectured by recent investigators that he was a certain Jeremiah Felbinger, an unorthodox scholar—he seems to have had leanings towards Unitarianism or Socinianism—who supported himself in Amsterdam at about this time by tutoring in the classics. But the point is of little consequence, for Baruch did not remain with him long. Desiring, says Colerus, "to perfect himself in that Language," the student found a second teacher, a Dutchman named Franciscus Van den Ende; and of him we know a good deal more. This Dutchman was, from all indications, a sort of buccaneer of the intellect, a man as predatory in the world of learning as were so many of his compatriots in the world of trade. He was in his early fifties when the young Jew came to him, and was then conducting a private Latin school in Amsterdam. By birth the man was a Catholic, and by training a Jesuit; but he had abjured his vows some ten years earlier, and since then he had been by turns a lawyer, doctor, pamphleteer, diplomat, and book-seller! Having gone bankrupt in that last venture, he had finally been reduced to teaching, and it was while thus engaged that Baruch—apparently in the year 1652—first came under his influence.

Van den Ende, a product of Jesuit education, made an excellent pedagogue, and in the beginning his school enjoyed a high reputation among the wealthier burghers of Amsterdam. But later it began to fail, and for reasons not hard to discern. Van den Ende was known to be a Catholic by birth, and at first the story got abroad that he used his school to ensnare the sons of good Calvinists and deliver them over to Rome. (The zealous Protestants of Holland, still suffering from the hysteria engendered by their long war with Spain, lived in continual terror of the Roman Peril.) But later it was discovered that the man was really an infidel, and then it was rumored that his whole purpose as a teacher was to infect his innocent pupils not with Catholicism but atheism. The earlier accusation was, of course, absurd. Van den Ende, like so many other free-thinkers of Catholic birth, had never bothered to renounce the Church formally—indeed, when his daughter married, he seems to have insisted that her Protestant suitor should turn Catholic—but he was in no sense a propagandist for the Faith. But the later complaint was irrefutable: the man was almost brazenly an infidel. The good Pastor Colerus speaks with some warmth on the subject.

> "That Man," he says, "taught with good Success and a great Reputation; so that the Richest Merchants of that City intrusted him with the instruction of their Children, before they found out that he taught his Scholars something else besides *Latin*. For it was discovered at last that he sowed the first Seeds of Atheism in the Minds of those Young Boys. This is a matter of fact which I cou'd prove, if there was any necessity for it, by the Testimony of several honest Gentlemen who are still living, and some of whom have been Elders of the *Lutheran* Church at *Amsterdam*. Those good Men bless every day the Memory of their Parents who took care in due time to remove them from the School of so pernicious and so impious a master."

And it was this reputation that eventually accomplished Van den Ende's ruin in Holland. Badgered year after year by the pietists, he finally had to close his school. In 1671 he moved to Paris—he was "too well known in Holland," says Colerus, "to find any Employment there"—and somehow got himself appointed personal physician to Louis XIV. He lost that position before long, however, and had to take to teaching again. But even then—he was already in his seventies—the man had not lost his passion for libertarian mischief. A group of French adventurers talked him into joining a conspiracy to overthrow the monarchy and set up a utopian republic in its place, and, on the discovery of the plot, poor Van den Ende was sent to the gallows. When news of his tragic end reached Amsterdam, no doubt many a good burgher there wagged his head and righteously muttered: "I told you so."

But all that happened years later. When Baruch first came for instruction to Van den Ende, the man was still in good repute. Undoubtedly that was why the youth was permitted to go to him. And by the time the true character of the teacher was discovered, the mischief was already done. Van den Ende was the last teacher in Amsterdam to whom the rabbis should have entrusted one of their disciples. Especially one like Baruch, whose hold on the faith was already shaken. A few months at the feet of that ex-Jesuit, and the youth no longer wavered in his piety—he was already wayward. Van den Ende tore away the scales already loose on Baruch's eyes and revealed to him the world. He revealed to him the new domains that had just been discovered by the learned of the age, those new sciences and arts and attitudes toward life destined to remake the whole character of man's existence. He was not content to teach him classic poetry and rhetoric; he evidently insisted on initiating him also into modern mathematics, natural science, and politics. It was impossible for him to do otherwise, for the man was by nature an evangelist, not a pedant. He himself had but recently discovered what was still called the "new knowledge"; and the fervor of a convert consumed him.

And Baruch, keen, quick, ravenous for all knowledge, made an ideal pupil. All his life he had lived penned in the ghetto, his mind haltered by rabbinic thought. And Van den Ende set him free. The man was himself none too well acquainted with the things he taught. Evidently he did know something of natural science, for he practiced as a physician; and he must have had a smattering of astronomy, for there is a record that he once invented some sort of nautical instrument which, for lack of a more reputable customer, he tried to sell to a company of pirates.* But there is no evidence that he had any profound knowledge of those subjects, or of philosophy, or of politics either. But for Baruch at that stage the man did not need to be profound; it was enough that he was inspiring. All the young Jew required was that someone should point the way; he could race along it unaided.

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* Van der Tak, *Bento de Spinoza, zijn Leven en Gedachten,* 1928, p. 26.

The way was new—new not alone to Baruch, but to the whole world. Centuries earlier there had been certain Greeks who had ventured out on it, but mankind had quailed from going in their wake. The narrow trails blazed by those Pagans became overgrown and obliterated, and for more than a millennium the mind of the race lay dormant in the shadowed valley of faith. But then the will to inquire reasserted itself. The Arab metaphysicians were the first to be moved by it, and with them went a few Jews. Averroes, Avicenna, Maimonides, and Ibn Gabirol—these and a straggling host of other Semitic rationalists tried to re-explore the paths of reason. Their success was slight, but they left an enduring memory. In time other men ventured out and labored to extend the clearings that had been made. It was slow work and arduous, for the underbrush was thick and the loam of tradition weighted their tread. But finally they prevailed and cleared enough of the surrounding wilderness so that light could begin to stream into the valley. And then there began a surge out into the uplands the like of which had never before been seen among men. By the middle of the seventeenth century the domain of knowledge had been so widened that it had become a whole new world, and on all its frontiers scholars were at work seeking to widen it still further. They were like the conquistadors and the traders of the time, save that they roamed the far places not for gold or spices but for truth. Lusting for more and yet more knowledge, they searched the heavens and the earth and the waters under the earth, sure that no treasure could long elude them. For they had discovered what seemed to them the only way that could lead to truth—they had learnt to reason critically.

By the time Baruch Spinoza first learnt of that way, it had already led certain investigators to discover vast hoards of truth. Men like Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo in astronomy, Vesalius and Harvey in physiology, Gilbert, Huygens, and Pascal in physics, Cardan, Napier, and Descartes in mathematics, had followed the trail of reason to mines of knowledge until then all unknown to the race. And when the young Jew heard of this from Van den Ende, his first concern was to see for himself what had been unearthed. Urged on by his master, the erstwhile Talmudist began to read the new gospels of the age, especially the treatises by Descartes. And the more he read, the more he was amazed. Shut up so long in the dark of rabbinic lore, he was dazzled by the glare suffusing those modern writings. The only natural science he had known until then was the farrago of alchemy, astrology, and augury contained in the Kabala; the only logic he had ever mastered was the casuistry of the Talmud and the dialectic of Jewish philosophy. And now that he began to read the books of the new age, his mind literally reeled.

One imagines he did not talk of those heretical books when he was at home or in the synagogue. As we have seen, he may already have come in for reprimand on account of his opinions, and he could have had no desire to come in for more. The "new philosophy" was known only by rumor in the Jodenbuurt. Descartes, who had spent much of his life in Holland, and whose ideas were already causing furious debate in the Dutch universities, was little more than a vaguely notorious name in the Amsterdam yeshivah. Giordano Bruno and Vanini, despite their scandalous deaths at the hands of the Inquisition, may have been not even names there. So young Baruch probably thought it wiser not to tell all he was learning at Van den Ende's.

But it was inevitable that the secret should be discovered. It was not necessary for Baruch to blurt it out. Watched as he was, the very look in his eyes may have betrayed him. Perhaps he began to show impatience when, on Sabbath afternoons, the learned gathered in the synagogue to discuss the Talmud. Perhaps he even absented himself at times from the services. Worse still, perhaps he began to consort with notorious characters like Juan da Prado, or was observed too frequently in the company of Gentiles. Worst of all, perhaps he was actually detected in infractions of the ritual. The ancient rabbis, in their anxiety to preserve the faith, had regimented the whole of life for the Jews. There were ordinances regulating not alone what one should eat, but also how one should trim the beard, and when one should interrupt work and begin to pray. The code of laws relative to the Sabbath—no work, no writing, no lighting or quenching fire, no travel, even no strolling beyond a certain distance—was so elaborate as to paralyze all common activity on that day. And though an ordinary Jew might be forgiven if he neglected the less exigent of these commands, a yeshivah student was expected to observe them all. And therefore it is highly possible that Baruch may have first given himself away by neglecting the pettier rites. It may not have been intentional; more likely it was a mere oversight. Engrossed in his new studies, he could no longer have had a mind for the minutiæ of the ancient ritual.

But if he did indeed betray himself, the rabbis were reluctant to take action against him. They evidently reasoned that it was unwise to be impatient, especially with a student who was not alone exceptionally brilliant, but was in addition the son of one of their chief elders. They let him go his way, sure that his wandering was but a passing phase. For those rabbis, it must be repeated, were relatively enlightened men. They, too, had perhaps wandered a little in their youth, and even now they still let their eyes stray at times. We can tell that from the books they possessed. A list has come down to us of the library left by one of them, and it is almost scandalously revealing. One finds in it not alone the Greek and Latin classics—Aristotle, Strabo, Aristophanes, Cicero, and Livy—but also the writings of the Church Fathers, and books by Francis Xavier, Montaigne, Grotius, Hobbes, and Machiavelli. There is even a volume entitled *A Gallant and Amusing History of France!* Books were costly in those days, and were not purchased recklessly. The owner of that library must have read those volumes, or must at least have intended to read them. Little wonder, then, that he may have been inclined to be patient with a disciple who was temporarily sowing his oats.

Baruch's father, however, may have been less lenient with the youth. There is a passage in the *Ethics* which rings strangely in the midst of the sustained impersonality of that treatise. In the thirteenth appendix to the Fourth Part we read

> ". . . just as young people, unable to endure with equanimity the reproaches of their parents, will run off to join the army . . . and will bear all sorts of discomforts just to be able to spite those parents."

One wonders: Could it have been a memory of his own youth that prompted the philosopher to offer that illustration? Not that he himself ever ran off to war; but he may quite possibly have been tempted to do so. For one imagines good Michael Despinoza may have been greatly exercised over the way his son had been behaving of late. "What is there in those priests' books that you will read nothing else?" the man may have pleaded.

All writings in Latin, whether by Descartes or Duns Scotus, were simply "priests' books" to Baruch's father. And he had a good Jew's abhorrence of them. To him they recalled all the dark past in Spain and Portugal, and he probably loathed the very sight of them. And Baruch, torn between respect for his father and love for truth, must have suffered anguish. Filial obedience was rooted in him—it was instilled in all children in the Jodenbuurt—and he dared not flare up no matter how great the provocation. Besides, though he was not much given to intense affection, he may have been quite fond of his parent. Fate, which had never been very kind to Michael Despinoza, had plagued him mercilessly of late. Two years after he lost his son, Isaac, his daughter Miriam—the one who had married the yeshivah student—was carried to her grave. (She died apparently in giving birth to her first child.) And hardly had he ceased to recite the mourner's prayer for this daughter, than his wife Ester was taken away. That happened in October 1652, and it left him for the third time a widower, his whole family reduced now to Rebeka who was still a spinster, Baruch who had become a problem, and a tiny grandchild who was motherless. The swift succession of tragedies evidently broke the poor man's spirit. He ceased to take active part in congregational affairs—his name never again appears in the synagogue archives—and he paid less and less heed to his business. And Baruch, seeing how harsh were his father's afflictions, could not have had the heart to add to them. One imagines he never answered back when the man chided him for his absorption in the "priests' books." Perhaps he even ceased to read them when at home. But that probably drove him to spend more and more time at Van den Ende's—which, of course, must have only given cause for more chiding.

It is not at all impossible, therefore, that Baruch may have been thinking of his own bitter experience when he wrote in the *Ethics* of how young people are moved to flee from home. . . .

CHAPTER VI

BUT then his father died. It happened in March 1654, less than a year and a half after the man saw his third wife carried to the grave. He was still only in his fifties when the end came; but the tribulations of the last years had evidently been too much for him. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery at Ouwerkerk, where lay far more of his family than remained behind to mourn him. Baruch was a young man of twenty-two at the time, and —unless our reconstruction of his history has been altogether erroneous—the tragedy opened a new chapter in his life. His closest bond with the Jodenbuurt was sundered now, and what ties remained could not hold him long. Not that he began to strain at them at once. No, more probably he reverted to strictest piety for a while. But that was because he had to recite the mourner's *kaddish* each day. Baruch had drifted far from the ancestral faith by then—how far he himself may not yet have realized—but he was still a son in Israel. It could not even have occurred to him to neglect the daily prayer for his father's soul. The rite itself was essentially magical, for its express purpose was to redeem the souls of the dead from Gehenna. It was believed that each sin-laden soul had to suffer in that purgatory for a whole year before it was finally saved or damned; and therefore it was deemed incumbent on the nearest kin—most of all on the son—to recite the *kaddish* day after day for eleven months. (To have recited it all twelve months would have been unseemly, for it would have been too complete an admission that the parent had sinned!) And it is inconceivable that Baruch, born and reared and still living in the Jodenbuurt, could have been moved to disregard such a duty.

But once those eleven months were passed, his piety probably began to wane once more. There was no abrupt break, and for yet several months he still remained in good standing in the synagogue. A notation in the congregational account-books reveals that on the Sabbath of the Feast of Lights in the year 5415—that is, on December 5, 1655, some twenty-one months after his father's death—Baruch Espinoza made an offering of six *placas*. Knowing the custom in Jewish congregations, the offering was most probably the payment for some "honor" given to the young man during the service on that day—perhaps he was called upon to read from the Holy Scroll—and from this we may infer that the synagogue elders still regarded him with favor.

But the time was soon to come when they were forced to revise their opinion. Of a sudden one day the news reached them that Baruch had left home! Taking his books and his clothes, he had fled the Jodenbuurt and had gone to live with Van den Ende. The rabbis must have been stunned by the report. Baruch, their most brilliant disciple, gone to live with a Gentile! No, worse: with a Gentile who was also a free-thinker! It was incredible. How could he pray in such a house, how stand each morning with the phylacteries on his head and arm while reciting the long Hebrew service? And how could he keep from eating unclean food? . . . No, the report must be false. It was impossible that Baruch, the son of Michael Despinoza, could commit such a "profanation of the Name"! . . .

Yet, as they soon enough discovered, the report was only too true. Baruch had apparently found it impossible to endure his home any longer. The continual prying and spying of his half-sister Rebeka, the tears, the frowns, the warnings with which she may have badgered him day after day, had finally worn him out. And when Van den Ende had generously offered to put him up in his house, Baruch had accepted. The young man was quite without funds, but he may have thought that once he had settled up his father's estate, he would be well able to pay for his keep. For the present he hoped to repay his host in part by assisting as an instructor in the school.

Precisely what ensued is unknown, but from fragmentary details reported by Colerus and Lucas it is not impossible to piece out the story. Baruch soon learnt that if he had counted on his inheritance, he had reckoned without Rebeka. The woman may all along have resented the fact that part of the family fortune, small as it was, would have to go to her half-brother; and now that the young man had acted so scandalously, she felt she was justified in contesting his claim. After all, their father had been a pious man. Why, then, should his hard-earned money go to a renegade? For that, the woman must have insisted, was what Baruch was—a blaspheming renegade! One can image her arguing her cause in the women's gallery in the synagogue, her dark face flushed, her nostrils flaring; and one can see her listeners nodding in vehement sympathy. Of course! He deserved not even a stiver, that eater of swine's flesh! She ought to go to the rabbis about it! . . .

She did go to them; and they, though unable to take any action, seem to have sided with her. And when Baruch heard of the agitation, he was incensed. He did not care about the money; it was the flagrant injustice of Rebeka's conduct that aroused his indignation. What had his opinions to do with his legal rights? Was he not his father's son? Even more: did not the estate include the legacy left by Baruch's own mother? Why, then, should he be cut off? . . . He went to the authorities about the matter. He called on a certain Louis Crayer, who represented the municipal "Masters of the Orphanages," to protect his rights, and this official straightway entered suit in the young man's behalf. The document, which bears the date March 23, 1656, is not easy to translate, for it is full of barbarous legal expressions and is clumsily indited.* In brief it argues that whereas Bento de Spinosa, as sole heir to "an important capital" left by his mother, is a preferred creditor of the estate left by his father, and whereas instead of insisting on his preference, said Bento de Spinosa had already paid off diverse other debts presented against the estate, therefore he should now be recognized as rightful heir to what remains, and be allowed to take possession thereof.

The action seems to have brought matters to a head. Rebeka, seeing that she had no legal case, must have appealed again to the rabbis; and they, fearful of a scandal, hastened to intercede. So far as they were concerned, the inheritance was a minor matter. What worried them was that Baruch was drifting from them completely. They saw that they must save him before it was too late, and not alone for his sake, but even more for the sake of all Israel. For those rabbis were acutely conscious of how precarious was the position of the Jews in Amsterdam. They realized that they still dwelt here largely on sufferance, and they knew they must avoid all unfavorable attention. Their one obsessive concern was *ma yomru ha-goyim,* "What will the Gentiles say?" They were still suffering from the publicity connected with the Uriel Acosta affair, and they shuddered at the thought of another such scandal. Enough crimes were already being imputed to the Jews; they could ill afford to be also accused of producing nothing but free-thinkers.

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* It is reprinted in an article by Willem Meijer in the *Chronicon Spinozanum,* 1921, p. 21. It is an interesting coincidence that this same Louis Crayer protected the rights of young Titus Rembrandt van Rijn, grandson of the painter and heir to his estate.

Nor was it only fear of what the Gentiles might say that spurred the rabbis to take action. In addition there was their zeal for the faith. Their fathers had died for that faith, and their brethren in the homelands were still dying for it. Could they then stand idly by and see one of their own sons make light of it? Each day fresh tidings came from Spain of the torments their kinsmen endured for the sake of the Law. (At that very moment the whole Jodenbuurt was saying *kaddish* for the heroic Bernal brothers who had just been martyred at Cordova.) And if Baruch, though free to keep the Law, yet transgressed it, then he was making a mockery of all those sufferings. It was disgrace and a shame!

So the rabbis bestirred themselves. They called Baruch before them and tried to reason with him. They were not peremptory. They had respect for Baruch not alone because of his own gifts, but also because of the pious memory of his father. They did not rave and storm; they pleaded. Why was he bringing this shame on his people? Why did he no longer attend the synagogue? Why had he left his home? Was it because of a quarrel over the inheritance? *Ach*, but that was so petty a matter for so great a to-do! If it was merely a question of money, then they would settle it forthwith. They would grant him a stipend. Yes, a thousand florins!

As a gift in token of their esteem for his great scholarship. Let him take it with their blessing and return to the fold. After all, they themselves as rabbis received stipends. Why, then, shouldn't he, who would soon, by the grace of God, be himself a rabbi? . . .

We are dependent on Pierre Bayle for our earliest report of that offer.* Colerus, who quotes the Dutch translation of Bayle's article, informs us that Spinoza himself recalled the incident more than once while chatting with his landlord in The Hague. And, according to this source, the philosopher repeatedly avowed that even "if they had offered him ten times as much, he would not have accepted it." We may well believe that. Knowing what disdain he showed for money throughout his adult years, remembering that he refused to accept financial aid even from friends and ardent admirers, it is impossible to doubt that he spurned the stipend offered by the synagogue authorities. He realized they were trying to buy him, that the stipend was no better than a bribe. Years later he wrote—it was one of the propositions in his *Ethics*—that "a free man living among unenlightened folk tries as much as he can to refuse their benefits." And already now he was determined to prove himself free. He may have been too polite and respectful to spurn the proposal with the scorn it deserved. Still somewhat awed in the presence of the rabbis, the unhappy youth may have done no more than shake his head and whisper no. But whatever his tone, his answer was final. The rabbis may have pleaded and cajoled. They may have urged him to sleep on the matter. But it was to no avail. Baruch remained obdurate. True son of his fathers, he was not to be moved either by promises or threats. As they had fought for their right to believe, so did he now fight for his right to disbelieve. So at last the rabbis gave it up. Kindness, they saw, was wasted on the obstinate young man. They decided to resort to coercion.

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* Bayle's article on Spinoza in his famous *Dictionaire historique et critique* published late in the 17th century was for long one of the most popular sources of information on the life and thought of the philosopher. Its biographical details are few, but, under the circumstances, highly significant. Its prolix, ill-informed, and obtuse discussion of Spinoza's philosophy is, of course, valueless.

Curiously, Lucas seems to know nothing of that attempt to bribe Baruch. According to his account, the session with the rabbis was unfriendly from the start. "With woebegone faces," Lucas tells us,

> "and like men consumed with zeal for the house of God, the judges said to [Baruch] that, after the great hopes which they had entertained because of his piety, they found it difficult to believe the evil rumor that was going around concerning him. Therefore, with troubled hearts, they had called him to give an account of his faith. He was accused of the most awful of all crimes, namely, contempt for the Law; and they ardently wished that he might clear himself of it. . . . They adjured him to confess . . . and, when he denied that he was guilty, his false friends who were present deposed boldly that they had heard him scoff at the Jews as 'superstitious people born and bred in ignorance, who do not know what God is, and who nevertheless have the audacity to speak of themselves as His people, to the disparagement of other nations.' . . . Whereupon the Judges, zealous to avenge the profanation of their Law,

> questioned [Baruch], pressed him, threatened him. . . . In the meantime Morteira, having heard of the peril in which his disciple was placed, hastened with long strides to the Synagogue, where, after taking his seat among the Judges, he demanded of [Baruch] whether he was mindful of the good example he had set him, whether his rebellion was the reward for the pains he had taken with his education, and whether [Baruch] was not afraid of falling into the hands of the living God. The scandal was already great, but there was still time for him to repent. . . . And after Morteira had exhausted his rhetoric without being able to shake the determination of his disciple, then as Chief of the Synagogue he urged him in a most formidable tone to make up his mind either to repent or be punished; and he vowed he would excommunicate him if he did not immediately show contrition. Undismayed, the disciple answered him that he knew the gravity of the threats and that, in return for the trouble which [Morteira] had taken to teach him the Hebrew language, he was quite willing to show him how to perform the excommunication! At which the rabbi in a passion vented all his spleen against him . . . and left the Synagogue with the vow not to return save with the thunderbolt in his hand." . . .

Such is Lucas's version of the interview, and it is obviously of little worth. The very fact that it presumes to quote the testimony verbatim is itself sufficient to discredit the whole report. One imagines it was no such single stormy trial that brought on the final rupture, but rather a series of increasingly strained interviews. The language used by the rabbis when at last they did pass sentence on Baruch, seems to indicate that clearly. They admitted then that they had "long known" of his evil opinions and ways, and had tried repeatedly "by diverse means and promises" to dissuade him from them. Evidently therefore it was not until they had failed with kindness, that they resorted to excommunication.

It was apparently in the late spring of 1656 that the *niddui*, the "short ban," was at last pronounced against the recreant. Colerus, who had an ecclesiastic's interest in the matter, devotes fully a fifth of his biography to a discussion of the various forms of excommunication practiced by the Jews. Of the *niddui* he writes—not incorrectly—that it consisted of two phases:

> "First, they separated the guilty Person, and he was prohibited to enter the Synagogue for a week, after he had received a severe reprimand, and had been earnestly exhorted to repent, and to put himself in a condition of obtaining the forgiveness of his fault. Which if he did not perform, he was allowed one month longer to think of his duty. During all that time he was to keep at eight or ten paces distance from every body, and none durst keep Company with him except those who brought him his Meat and Drink . . . every Body was forbidden to eat and drink with such a Man, or to wash in the same Bath; yet that he might, if he would, go to the Assemblies only to hear and instruct himself." . . .

Baruch could not but have been dismayed at such a sentence. It was one thing voluntarily to have moved out of the Jodenbuurt, but it was quite another to find himself shut out. For he was still a Jew, attached to the habits of Jews, and trained in their ways. Van den Ende and a few other emancipated Gentiles might have become his staunch friends—but they could never be his kinsmen. He was an alien among them, speaking their tongue with the Jodenbuurt accent, and living their life with effort. He might cut off his beard—perhaps he had already done so—and he might discard his Hebrew name. But he would still remain a Jew in their eyes, and would never feel quite at ease in their midst. Yet he had to choose now once and for all between them and his own brethren. Either he returned immediately to the tents of Jacob, or he was shut out for evermore!

It must have tried him savagely to keep from returning—but he did. That same stubbornness which had made his ancestors capable of flouting the church inquisitors, steeled him now against the synagogue elders. He refused to concede that he had committed a crime in daring to think for himself, and he could see no reason for crawling back for forgiveness. He would not put on the mourning required of a penitent, nor would he go barefoot and unbathed. On the contrary, he conducted himself as though nothing had occurred!

There was consternation among the rabbis. They had expected, of course, that the *niddui* would bring the son of Michael Despinoza immediately to heel. It had had that effect only a few weeks earlier in the case of Juan da Prado—and that worthy had been a far more hardened sinner. The rabbis were in a dilemma. For obvious reasons they were reluctant to go on to the next step, the *herem,* the "great ban." It was, it must be confessed, not a rare thing for Jewish leaders to resort to that step when quarrelling among themselves. Indeed there are instances where the *herem* was fulminated against a Jew who dared enter the synagogue with a walking-stick in his hand, and against another who failed to greet the president of a congregation with due respect! * But in such instances the ban was little more than a convenient weapon with which synagogue politicians belayed each other. It was far different in the case of Baruch de Spinoza. His crime was no mere breach of decorum, and the interest in it was not confined to the Jodenbuurt. The rabbis realized that if they did excommunicate the young man, he would not go off and join some other synagogue. He would go over to the Gentiles—worse still, the free-thinking Gentiles—and be lost to Israel forever. And the very thought of that eventuality made them hesitate.

One wonders what might have happened had Manasseh ben Israel been present at that juncture. Astuter than the other rabbis, more tolerant and worldly-wise, he might have found some way of averting the seemingly inevitable rupture. But he was off in England at the time, busily engaged there trying to convince Cromwell and Parliament to re-admit the Jews. His colleagues at home, Saul Morteira, Isaac Aboab, and David Pardo, were less adept at diplomacy. To them it seemed that to relent now would be to reveal themselves impotent. More than that: if they allowed this *epikouros* to remain in their midst, he might corrupt others. Evidently Baruch had already done that—or was at least accused of having done it—for the writ of excommunication speaks of the "horrible heresies which he practiced and taught" (*horrendas heresias que practicava e ensinava*) and the "monstrous actions which he committed" (*ynormas obras que obrava.*) Nor was that the worst that might come of sparing him. He might even try to teach his blasphemous doctrines to Gentiles, and then the entire Jodenbuurt would be made to blame. The rabbis knew well the quality of Baruch's mind and they could not hope that he would sink into obscurity. No, far more likely he would make a mark for himself, and, because it would be an evil mark, all the Jews in the city would be blamed for it—unless they washed their hands of him in time. So there was nothing left save to pronounce the *herem.*

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* Sokolow, *Baruch Spinoza u-z'mano: midrash b-filosofiyah u-v'koros ha-ittim*, Jerusalem, 1930, p. 197.

Not since the affair of Uriel Acosta had such a scandal occurred in the Jodenbuurt, and one imagines little else was talked of in the quarter. The prevailing opinion must, of course, have been bitterly hostile to Baruch, and if there were any who sided with him, they probably got little chance to speak their mind. The iron of bigotry had so long been rusting in their souls that those Jews were incapable of being tolerant. The Jewish mob wanted to do to the heretic precisely what a Christian mob would have wanted to do—put him to death. Indeed, it is reported that the crime was actually attempted!

The details of that attempt on Baruch's life are not altogether clear. Colerus writes:

> "*Spinosa's* Landlord and his Wife . . . had it from *Spinosa* himself, who did often tell them, that one Evening as he was coming out of the Old *Portuguese* Synagogue, he saw a Man by him with a Dagger in his Hand; whereupon standing upon his guard, and going backwards, he avoided the blow, which reached no farther than his Cloaths. He still kept the Coat that was run thro' with the Dagger as a Memorial of that event." . . .

According to Bayle, however, the assault occurred when Baruch was leaving not the synagogue, but a playhouse. Of the two, the second account seems the more plausible, for what would Baruch have been doing in the synagogue at this time? On the other hand, it is quite likely that he might have been seen leaving a theater, for we know that Van den Ende's own pupils sometimes put on plays. That was, incidentally, one of the causes of complaint against the schoolmaster, for the pious Calvinists believed all play-acting to be sinful. They considered the theater an adjunct of the brothel—which it really was, most of the time—and they raised loud clamor against the performances which Van den Ende staged each year. And not impossibly it was when Baruch was leaving one of these performances that the attempt was made on his life.

Such an experience must have been utterly horrifying to one of Spinoza's constitution. He was no coward—he proved that amply by the way he held out against the rabbis—but obviously he was very sensitive. Being physically weak, it must have moved him almost to nausea to think how close he had been to death. Bayle reports that the assailant actually slashed Baruch's face, and it is perhaps significant that Van der Spyck should not have known that detail. Spinoza seems to have told him only of the rent in his coat, and that may have been because the thought of the real wound so sickened the gentle philosopher that he had unconsciously blotted it from his mind. "Death for freedom is glory," he once wrote. But those were mere words—sincere enough, but still no more than words. Catching sight in the dark of a murderer's hand could not but have made him weak with horror.

And in all likelihood that was why he now suddenly went away. Lucas gives another reason for his departure —it will be mentioned a little later in this chronicle— but Colerus says definitely that, "not thinking himself to be safe at Amsterdam, [Baruch] resolved to retire somewhere else with the first opportunity." He fled to the village of Ouwerkerk, just outside the city, where he may have found refuge in the house of a certain Dirk Tulp who was a friend of Van den Ende. There he was fairly well removed from danger, not alone because of the distance from the Jodenbuurt, but also because Tulp's brother-in-law was a councilman in Amsterdam.*

The rabbis did not wait for the heretic to return. Instead they proceeded with the excommunication. Lucas gives a lurid description of the ceremony.

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* Van der Tak, *Bento de Spinoza,* p. 29.

> "Excommunication among the Jews is in no way peculiar," he writes. "Yet, in order not to omit anything that may instruct the reader, I will now refer to the principal circumstances. When the people have assembled in the synagogue, the ceremony which they call Herim [*sic*]—which in Hebrew means "separation"—begins with the lighting of a quantity of black wax-candles, and the opening of the Ark where the Books of the Law are kept. Then the precentor, standing on a slightly raised place, intones the words of the excommunication in a doleful voice, while another precentor blows a horn—which in Hebrew is called Sophar [*sic*]—and the wax-candles are turned upside down so as to make them fall drop by drop into a vessel full of blood. Thereupon the people, stirred by a holy horror at the sight of the black spectacle, respond *Amen* in a furious tone, thus bearing witness to the good service which they believe they would render to God if they could tear the excommunicated to pieces; as they would do without doubt if they met him at that moment or when leaving the synagogue." . . .

We do not know whence Lucas derived all this gory information. Perhaps it was from some Jew with a rich sense of the dramatic and a faulty knowledge of the facts. But the point is inconsequential, for, as Lucas himself goes on to say, that gruesome ceremony was not enacted in the case of Spinoza. There was, he suggests, merely a formal reading of the writ of excommunication before the assembled congregation; and in that he is apparently correct. The writ itself, which is dated the sixth of Ab, 5416—July 27, 1656—and is in Spanish, is still to be found in the synagogue archives. It opens with the declaration:

"The Elders hereby make known that they have long since been cognisant of the wrong opinions and behaviour of Baruch de Espinoza, and have tried by various means and promises to dissuade him from his evil ways. But as they effected no improvement—obtaining on the contrary more information each day of the horrible heresies which he practised and taught, and of the monstrous actions which he committed—and as they had many trustworthy witnesses who in the presence of the same Espinoza reported and testified against him and convicted him, and after investigating the whole matter in the presence of the Rabbis, they finally decided with the consent of these [Rabbis] that the same Espinoza should be excommunicated and separated from the people of Israel. Accordingly they now excommunicate him with the following excommunication:

"*After the judgment of the Angels, and with that of the Saints, we excommunicate, expel, curse, and damn Baruch de Espinoza with the consent of God, Blessed be He, and with the consent of all the Holy Congregation, in front of the Holy Scrolls with the six-hundred-and-thirteen precepts which are written therein, with the excommunication with which Joshua banned Jericho, with the curse with which Elisha cursed the boys, and with all the curses which are written in the Law* [Pentateuch]. *Cursed be he by day and cursed be he by night; cursed be he when he lieth down, and cursed be he when he riseth up; cursed be he when he goeth out, and cursed be he when he cometh in. The Lord will not pardon him; the anger and wrath of the Lord will rage against this man, and bring upon him all the curses which are written in the Book of the Law; and the Lord will destroy his name from under the Heavens; and the Lord will separate him to his hurt from all the tribes of Israel with all the curses of the firmament which are written in the Book of the Law. But you who cleave unto the Lord your God, you are all alive this day.*

> "We command that none should communicate with him orally or in writing, or show him any favour, or stay with him under the same roof, or within four ells of him, or read anything composed or written by him."

Thus was Baruch Spinoza cast out of the congregation of Israel.

Much has been said against those responsible for the excommunication, but perhaps they should be more pitied than blamed. They were products of their age, and as little culpable as those magistrates who in our age still persecute the social heretics. For their time, indeed, those rabbis of Amsterdam were, if anything, singularly merciful. The awful maledictions which they heaped on Baruch's head were largely conventional. They heaped them no less fulsomely on the heads of men who committed quite trivial crimes, for the language of the *herem* was literally a formula inherited from the early Middle Ages. Even had that not been the case, the action of the rabbis would still have been relatively mild, for their curses, no matter how black, were still no more than curses. They roundly damned the heretic's soul, but at least they left his body alone. . . .

Of course, that may well have been because they were without rights over his body. Had the law of the land left their hands as free as their tongues, Baruch might have got off less lightly. Lucas seems to have been convinced of that, and he offers evidence to substantiate his opinion. According to his account, Baruch was still in Amsterdam when the final ban was pronounced against him, and seemed minded to remain there as though nothing had happened. And this, says Lucas, goaded the Jews to fury. Morteira especially was incensed, for it seemed to him a personal affront that the outcast should be breathing the same air with him. "But what could he do to drive him out of it?" asks the biographer. "He was not the chief of the city as he was of the synagogue." * But, we are told, "so potent is malice in the guise of a feigned zeal," that finally the rabbi did discover a way of getting the heretic banished. Accompanied by one of his colleagues, he sought out the municipal authorities, and, with "holy hatred" burning in his "unforgiving heart," he pleaded with them to order Spinoza to leave the city. But these officials, perceiving that the rabbi was motivated "more by personal animosity than religious zeal," would not take action until the church authorities had looked into the matter. And the latter, "though they could discern nothing impious" in the young man's utterances, nevertheless sided with him "whose office made them think of their own." ("So true is it," comments the author, "that the clergy, no matter what their religion, be they Heathens, Jews, Christians, or Mohammedans, are more concerned for their own Authority than for Justice and Truth, and are

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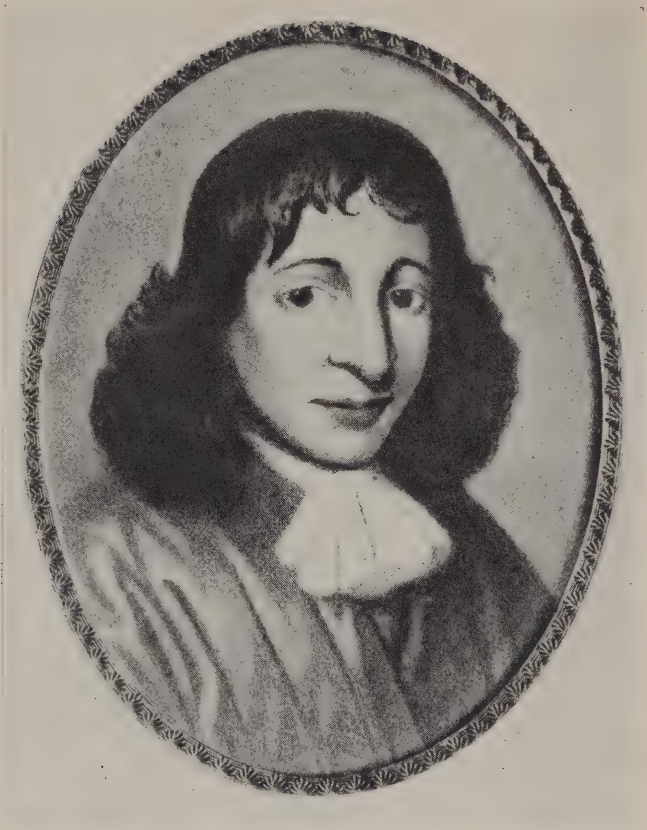
* Lucas is, of course, in error in describing Morteira as the "*Chef de la Synagogue.*" He was merely the presiding officer when the local *beth din,* the rabbinical court, gathered to decide religious questions.

all alike animated with the spirit of Persecution.") Whereupon the Magistrates, having no other recourse, condemned Baruch de Spinoza to be banished from Amsterdam for several months. And "thus was Rabbinism avenged.". . .

Such is the story recounted by Lucas, and no one can say whether it is fiction or truth. It is not mentioned in any of the other early accounts of Spinoza's life, nor is it substantiated by any record in the court or synodical archives. Having no knowledge of the attempt on Baruch's life, Lucas may have concocted the whole story simply to explain the young man's departure from the city. It is difficult to account for the report in any other way. Morteira and his colleagues may indeed have been furious at the obstinacy of their former disciple; but it is hardly likely that they could have been so impolitic as to drag the scandal into the courts. More probably they felt they had done enough in that they had banned the recreant with the *herem.* They and their people had washed their hands of him with that act. To them Baruch de Spinoza was now as one who was dead. . . .



PORTRAIT OF SPINOZA
commonly attributed to Van der Spyck, and now in the Huis ten Bosch, The Hague.

BOOK TWO

IN THE WORLD

After experience had taught me that all the customary attractions of social life are vain and futile . . . I finally resolved to inquire whether there might be a way which would lead me to enjoy continuous, supreme, and unending happiness. . . .

"On the Improvement of the Understanding."

CHAPTER I

BARUCH was not yet twenty-four years of age when his brethren cast him forth from the house of Israel. He showed no dismay when news of his excommunication was brought to him. "All the better," he is reported to have said: "they do not drive me to anything I should not have done of my own accord, had I not dreaded the scandal." But his composure was evidently studied. At heart, one has reason to believe, he felt wounded and angry. One can tell that from the way he was wont to speak of the Jews from that day on—always with a certain ascerbity and an ill-concealed rancor. One can tell it, too, from the fact that he sat down then and there to pen a reply to the rabbis. The precise nature of this reply is no longer known, for the document was never printed, and the manuscript has long been lost. All we are told is that it was written in Spanish and contained many of the contentions later elaborated in his *Treatise on Theology and Politics*. If it ever reached those for whom it was directly intended, it failed altogether to affect them. The maledictions were not recalled, nor was the ban relaxed. His name was literally blotted out in the Jodenbuurt—as late as the nineteenth century an instance was discovered in one of the old archives of Spinoza's name struck out in black ink *—and he was mourned as one who was dead.

But they were soon enough to discover that he was still among the living. The suit he had filed for his share of his father's estate was at last decided, and in his favor. Rebeka, who had tried with all her might to have her half-brother disinherited in the writ of excommunication, was left with only her just share. But that was not the end of the matter. Having won the suit and triumphed over the covetous woman, Baruch now turned around and spurned the money! All he took was "a good bed with its furnishings"; the rest he would not touch. It was no light thing for him to do, for, though there may have been little in the estate, he could have made good use of what there was. He had no funds of his own, and, except perhaps as a tutor, he had no way of earning any. Yet, with that utter indifference to money which was to characterize him throughout his life, he simply asked for that "good bed with its furnishings."

But, having made that extraordinary gesture, the outcast now found himself faced with the problem of earning his livelihood. It meant, of course, that he must leave Ouwerkerk, for there was nothing to which he could turn his hand in so small a place. He could not

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* Isaak da Costa, *Israel en de volken*, 1873, p. 475.

hope to become the village schoolmaster, and he was unfitted to be a farmer. Obviously he had to go back to Amsterdam, for there he had better prospects of finding something to do. Several weeks had already elapsed since his flight from the city, and the excitement among the Jews there had probably died down completely. There was no reason, therefore, why he should stay away any longer.

And once back in Amsterdam, he did find employment. His study of Descartes had led him to an interest in optics, and this in turn suggested to him the idea of learning the craft of lens-grinding. Colerus somehow got the curious idea that Spinoza was prompted to become an artisan because it was enjoined by the ancient rabbis. With a characteristic display of erudition the pastor declares:

> "The Law and the ancient Jewish Doctors do expressly say, that it is not enough for a man to be learned, but that he ought besides to learn a Profession or a Mechanical Art, that it may be a help to him in case of necessity, and that he may get therewith to maintain himself. This *Rabbin Gamaliel* does positively say in the Treatise of the *Talmuel* [*sic*] Pirke avoth Chap. 2 where he teaches, that the study of the Law is a very desirable thing when it is attended with a Profession or a Mechanical Art. For, says he, a continual application to those two exercises keeps a Man from doing Evil, and makes him forget it; and every Learned Man, who neglects to learn a Profession will at last turn to a loose Man. And *Rabbi Jehuda* adds, that every Man who does not take care that his children shou'd learn a Trade, does the same thing as if he taught them how to become High-waymen. *Spinosa* being well versed in the Study of the Law, and

> of the Customs of the Ancients, was not ignorant of these maxims, and did not forget them, tho he was separated from the Jews, and excommunicated by them. Because they are wise and reasonable Maxims he made good use of 'em, and learned a Mechanical Art. . . ."

All of which, despite that it has been naively repeated in many of the later accounts of Spinoza's life, is obviously nonsense. That particular precept of the Talmudic sages was already obsolete many centuries before Spinoza was born, and not alone because the guild system in Christendom made it almost impossible for Jews to become craftsmen, but also because the complexity of later Jewish life made it imperative that rabbinic learning should become a profession. If Baruch became an artisan, it was not out of respect for the archaic tradition, but solely from necessity. Unable to use his learning as "a spade wherewith to dig"—to use the Talmudic opprobrium—seeing that the universities were closed to him, and private tutoring was unsteady, there was no recourse open to him save to learn a trade. Of course, he might have taken to commerce, for all Amsterdam was a counting-house, and he might easily have found employment with some broad-minded Dutch merchant. But Spinoza very obviously had no bent for commerce, and he could have thought only with loathing of a life spent over ledgers. An occupation like lens-grinding, on the contrary, must have appealed to him strongly, for it could not merely provide for his wants, but in addition was in line with his interests.

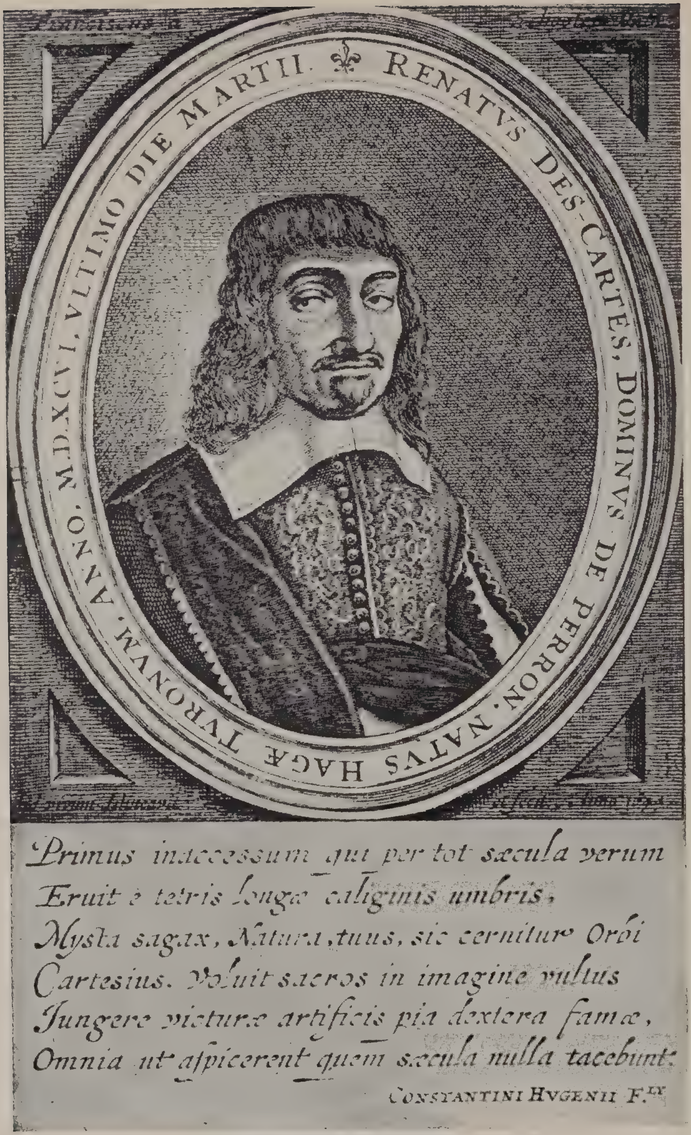
The telescope and microscope were recent inventions, and all the inquisitive minds in Europe were fascinated by the instruments. To laymen like Samuel Pepys they were still largely amusing novelties, but to the more serious students they were veritable keys to salvation. The one complaint of those students was that the instruments were still crude, and some of them devoted much of their leisure to improving them. Lens-grinding became the chief hobby in the scientific circles of that generation—much as photography is today—and leading investigators, for instance Descartes and Huygens, became highly adept at it.

There was good reason, therefore, why young Spinoza should have been drawn to this craft. He was gifted with his hands—as we shall see, he developed distinct talent as an artist at one time—and it must have afforded him delight to labor at making those "spy-glasses." It was not strenuous toil, and did not demand incessant concentration. Much of it was merely mechanical, requiring only steady pressure of the hand as the abrasive tool was moved over the glass. And to the young philosopher that may have been one of the attractions of the pursuit. His mind could continue to reflect about life while his hands labored to earn him a living.

Happily, lens-grinding was not in the hands of a guild—it was too new a craft—and Spinoza, despite his birth, was free to engage in it. Happily also, Holland was the chief center of the industry—the telescope and microscope had both been invented by Dutchmen early in that century—and there could have been no lack of masters to whom to go for instruction. Once he learnt the rudiments—and that could not have taken him long—he attained marked skill in making lenses. Colerus assures us that the philosopher "so well succeeded that People came to him from all Parts to buy his glasses; which did sufficiently afford him wherewith to live and maintain himself."

But nevertheless it was tragic that Spinoza should have chosen such a way of earning his livelihood. Predisposed as he was to tuberculosis, he was not fitted for lens-grinding. It was wet, uncleanly work, what with the pitch that was used to fasten the glass to the bench, and the rosin, tripoli, vitriol, and vinegar used as abrasives. And it kept him closely confined, his lungs breathing air filled with glass-dust. For hours on end he had to stand there stooped over the work-bench, his hand moving the tool round and round over the lens. First the glass had to be ground on both sides to just the correct shape and size; and then it had to be polished with great care to remove all spots and discolorations. Robert Smith in his *Compleat System of Opticks*—published in 1738—says that merely to polish a lens adequately one must give no less than three thousand strokes to each surface! And in an age when there were no machines, not even treadle-lathes, that meant days, perhaps even weeks, of application.

But Spinoza was not deterred by that. Almost to his


RENATVS DES-CARTES, DOMINVS DE PERRON · NATVS HAGÆ TVRONVM, ANNO. M.D.XCVI, VLTIMO DIE MARTII.
Primus inaccessum qui per tot sæcula verum
Eruit e tetris longæ caliginis umbris,
Mysta sagax, Natura, tuus, sic cernitur Orbi
Cartesius. Voluit sacros in imagine vultus
Jungere victuræ artificis pia dextera famæ,
Omnia ut aſpicerent quem sæcula nulla tacebunt.
CONSTANTINI HVGENII F.^{ix}

RENÉ DESCARTES
from the Elzevir Edition of his "Principia Philosophiae."

dying day he continued to grind lenses, quite ignorant apparently of how it was destroying his health. At first he may not even have noticed the flush creeping into his cheeks, or the aggravation of his coughing. From infancy he had seen flushed faces all around him, and he was used to the sound of coughing. Besides, he was far too preoccupied to have time to watch his health. If he felt fatigued after his long hours at the work-bench, he simply did not go out. He remained in his lodgings, supping off a crust and a bowl of soup, and then turned at once to his books. For his craving for knowledge was fiercer now than ever, goading him to read and ponder no matter how his body might ache. His chief interest at this time was in the writings of Descartes, for they had opened up a new universe to him. Long into the night he would pore over them, his weary body, no doubt, still swaying as in the yeshivah days. Almost all the free intellectuals of that generation were studying Descartes, especially in Holland, where the Frenchman had taken refuge while developing his philosophy. For a brief period the man had actually lived in Amsterdam; but there is no likelihood that Spinoza could have met him then. At that time, 1643, the young Jew was still a pupil in the Hebrew school, and probably did not know even of Descartes' existence. The Frenchman was an exceedingly reserved individual who moved about with a quietness that was near to stealth. An unprepossessing creature, short, beetle-browed, with long black hair combed down almost to his eyes, he was wont to make himself even more inconspicuous by dressing in unobtrusive black. Though his repute among the learned was already great by then, his presence in Amsterdam may have been known only to his father-confessor, and perhaps a bookseller or two.

But though Spinoza may never have seen Descartes plain, it was enough for him that he could read his works. They became what the Torah had once been to the young Jew—a revelation of the ultimate truths concerning existence. One can well understand why that should have been. Descartes had actually accomplished what no one before him had been able to do: he had applied the methods of science to the matter of abstract thought. And therewith he had given an entirely new turn to speculation. Until his coming, all philosophy had been largely traditional. For the most part it had either stumbled in the frozen ruts of Aristotelian logic, or it had slithered in Neo-Platonic ooze. But with the publication in 1637 of Descartes' *Philosophic Essays*, the search for truth took on a new direction. The first and most significant of those essays was one entitled *A Discourse on the Method of guiding Reason, and of discovering Truth in the Sciences.* In it Descartes laid down the proposition that the only sure way of arriving at the truth was to begin by doubting everything. If you did that, then you were left with at least one fact which defied all doubt: namely, that there was the "you" who did the doubting. *Dubito ergo sum,* "I doubt therefore I must exist"—this was axiomatic. Beginning, then, with the reality of consciousness—for doubting was a form of thinking, and how could there be thinking without consciousness?—all one need do in order to build a valid philosophy, said Descartes, was explore the logical implications of that reality. One must be careful, however, how one carried on the exploration. The safest way, this philosopher declared, was to adhere to the method of mathematics, for of all the sciences yet discovered by man, mathematics was the only one that seemed infallible. Therefore in coping with the problems of metaphysics one should employ the rules of geometry, reducing each difficulty to its simplest elements, accepting of these only the self-evident ones, and then deducing from them increasingly complex generalizations. If one did that, checking all the time for errors, then one must inevitably arrive at ultimate conclusions deserving the subscription: "Q. E. D."

Such in brief was Descartes' doctrine, and its significance was not lost on the thinkers of his day. The conservatives were outraged, for they saw in its rooted skepticism, and in its insistence on the primacy of reason, a direct challenge to all that they deemed holy. Not that Descartes had intended any such challenge. On the contrary, being himself a very devoted son of the Church—he had been educated by Jesuits and never outgrew their influence—he had imagined his doctrine could provide a new vindication of the traditional faith. As Prof. Wolf has put it, Descartes' summons to universal doubt was a flourish rather than a serious call to arms. His own employment of the geometrical method of deduction enabled him to prove not alone that a transcendental God did exist, and that the soul was immortal, but even that the doctrine of Transubstantiation was rational! But the churchmen were not taken in. Instinctively they sensed the menace of his "new philosophy," and Catholic and Protestant alike condemned it out of hand. As one cleric put it, Descartes "craftily and clandestinely infects with the poison of atheism those too dull to detect the snake in the grass."

But intense as was the opposition, no less intense was the support. It is said that the *Discourse on Method* became so popular in the smarter courts of Europe that one might have thought it a volume of boudoir reminiscences. If we are to believe Molière, even the ladies in the salons fell to toying with its profound scholia. The eccentric Queen Christina of Sweden, a girl not yet twenty years of age, became so excited over Descartes' writings that she sent a vessel of her royal navy to bring the author to her capital. There she made him get up at five o'clock each morning to give her an hour of instruction in his philosophy—and so taxed the poor man that he died before six months had passed!

But his most ardent and intelligent disciples from the very first were the intellectuals living in Holland. To them Descartes was indeed a prophet, and they devoured his writings much as the intellectuals of our day have been devouring Freud. If they were rarely able to digest what they devoured, they themselves did not confess it. Actually Descartes had been a scientist rather than a philosopher—he himself confessed that he had been wont to devote some hours each day to mathematics and some hours each year to metaphysics—but most of his disciples paid no heed to that. They put to one side the tough sinews of his analytical geometry and the dry bones of his dioptrics. What they most relished was the rich meat of his philosophic method. For the current revolution in the ways of living had shaken the foundations of belief. The rise of commerce and the attendant crumbling of medieval faith had left the enlightened at sea. What had happened to that young Jew in the ghetto of Amsterdam, had happened to countless Christians throughout Western Europe. They had drifted from their traditional moorings, and they were in a panic to lay hold of new ones. They hungered for security; they craved to know what was true concerning life and the universe. And because they thought Descartes could satisfy their wants, they pored over his *Philosophic Essays* as over gospels.

In Amsterdam there was apparently a whole circle of such devotees. Its members were, of course, few in number, and their devotion was regarded as no little bizarre by the rest of the population. The prevailing obsession was commerce, for Amsterdam had become the chief market-place of the world. It controlled the world's supply of tea, and dominated the markets for spices and rice. It exported herrings to every land in Europe, and shipped Delft China and clay-pipes all over the globe. The stocks of its chief trading companies, the East Indian and the West Indian, soared in value with each year; at times they paid dividends as high as twenty per cent. Everybody gambled, from the patricians to the hucksters. So mad was the race for wealth that for a time there was actually a financial boom in tulips. Speculators paid the price of an estate for bulbs of a rare variety. They traded in "futures," buying and selling options on novel specimens which had not yet been even grown. The boom crashed before long, and financial chaos ensued. But it did not cure the people of their madness; they soon found other commodities to boom. The lust for quick gain was like a consuming fire. Even the babes, it is said, could prattle nothing save, "How much?"

But this rampant commercialism brought with it an inevitable consequence. Business—which is literally busyness—gave rise at last to leisure. And with leisure came culture. Once an element in the population had more than enough to make life possible, it began to look about for ways to make life desirable. The wealthier Dutch burghers learnt to be ashamed of philistinism, and began to interest themselves in art and science. They began to fill their houses with books and paintings, and took to sending their sons to the universities. Painters found a ready market for their wares—it was the age of Rembrandt, Rubens, and Franz Hals—and the poets—with the sad exception of the greatest of them all, poor Joost van den Vondel—were men of wealth and high station. Above all, the men of learning were able to flourish there, for the republic was (relatively) liberal in spirit, and the universities were handsomely endowed. Descartes was but one of many foreign scientists who found a haven in Holland. Leyden became one of the foremost universities in the world, and professors and students flocked to it from far and wide. By the middle of the seventeenth century the little land that had once been a salt marsh became the cultural center of Europe. Even in Paris it was a thing to boast about if one was "*civilesé en Hollande.*" . . .

It was this ferment of art and learning in the newly rich country that produced the circle of amateur philosophers in Amsterdam. They were for the most part young merchants and professional men of good family, and their devotion, as we have said, was rather frowned upon by the rest of the community. That was because they were suspected of being free-thinkers—a suspicion by no means unfounded, seeing that Van den Ende was among them. Not that they were all as emancipated in thought as was the schoolmaster. On the contrary, most of the members of the circle were apparently still quite earnest Christians. They no longer belonged to the established church, it is true—but only because they had gone over to the dissenting sects. One can well understand why they should have done that. Organized religion was still an exceedingly potent element in society, and only the most intrepid spirits could conceive of living without any church connections. And because the Dutch Reformed Church had become sodden with power, the more devout in heart, as well as the more liberal in mind, were naturally driven from it to the sectarian groups.

There were many such groups in Holland at the time, and they were not all the

> "Petulant, capricious sects,
> The maggots of corrupted texts,"

who so tried Samuel Butler's patience. Some indeed—especially the Collegiants and Mennonites—seem to have been of a most admirable order. They drew their chief support from farmers and farmers' wives who hungered after the simple faith of Jesus. Repelled by the ritualism of the state church, and the dogmatism of its pastors, these lowly folk were wont to gather in bare rooms or barns to join in services in which the "Spirit" could hold sway. They were passionately idealistic, refusing to bear arms for any cause, and insisting on utter liberty of religious conscience. And for that last reason, if no other, their movements greatly attracted certain of the intellectuals.

Derk Tulp, whose house near Ouwerkerk may have been Baruch's refuge when he was forced to flee from Amsterdam, was one such educated sectarian. There were several others with whom the young Jew had evidently become friendly during the time he lived at Van den Ende's. And now that Spinoza was back in Amsterdam, he seems to have foregathered with them frequently. Cut off from his own people, it cheered him to have friends somewhere. And these were good friends, sober, intelligent, and sympathetic. Some of them are known to us by name. The ablest by far was a young physician named Lodewijk Meyer, who seems to have been rather unlike the others in temperament. He was less sober than they—he never joined any of their pious sects—and found time not alone to study metaphysics, but also to write poetry, direct theatricals, and pay court to ladies. The others, for all that they were more single-minded in their devotion, never equalled his attainments as a student of philosophy. Their only claim to fame is that they befriended Spinoza, and in later years helped to bring his writings before the public. There was, for instance, a merchant named Pieter Balling, who was later to prepare the Dutch translation of Spinoza's *Geometrical Proof of the Cartesian Principles;* and another named Jarig Jelles, who was to defray the cost of printing that book; and a book-seller named Jan Rieuwertsz who was to publish it. There was also Simon Joosten de Vries, likewise a merchant, who was to become Spinoza's most devoted disciple.

How and where and when they foregathered we do not know. In all likelihood the members of the group were in the habit of dropping in of an evening at Jan Rieuwertsz's bookshop, or at Van den Ende's house. There, gathered around the great tiled oven, they would sit and argue, probably quite late into the night. They may have discussed politics at times, praising the policies of Jan de Witt, the republican pensionary, and condemning the intrigues of the aristocrats. Or they may have talked of art and literature, of a new painting by Rembrandt or a new poem by old Vondel. But most of the time they discussed philosophy, and in particular the philosophy of Descartes.

It must have been pleasant to Spinoza to join in those sessions, for he liked companionship, especially now that he was an outcast, and he was at ease in a discussion. Not that he was ever glib with words, or could affect what Lucas calls "elegant diction." Yet, says this biographer—and he evidently speaks from personal knowledge—"his conversation had such an air of geniality, and his illustrations were so apt, that he made everybody fall in with his views." One imagines it was not difficult, therefore, for the Jew to hold his own in that circle. His long schooling in the Talmud had sharpened his wits, and his patient study of the medieval Jewish philosophers had developed his powers of reflection. In addition, he was by this time probably better versed in Descartes than were any of the others. During these last two or three years he had apparently been studying little else, and he had learnt his way about in the Cartesian maze.

And his companions were not slow to recognize his superiority. He was perhaps the poorest of them all, and, being a Jew, certainly the humblest in social position. His beard must have been gone by now, and he may already have translated his name from Baruch to Benedictus. But his accent was still that of the Jodenbuurt, and he still had foreign ways. Yet the others could not help liking him. There was something very winning about this odd young Jew with his obvious honesty, patience, and quick understanding. At first he had, no doubt, appeared reserved to them, or even aloof; but they had soon discovered that he could be delightfully genial in his own curiously quiet way. And this coupled with his inordinate keenness of intellect and wealth of learning made them rejoice when he joined them of an evening. Indeed, it was not long before they actually began to look to him as the leader of their circle. They may have been reluctant followers at first, for they discovered that this free-thinking young Jew insisted on stepping in where even Descartes had feared to tread. Though as confirmed a Cartesian as they when he first joined the circle, Spinoza eventually dared begin to dispute certain points in the philosophy. He had become convinced that Descartes, among other mistakes, had not gone far enough in his explanation of the universe. The Frenchman had reduced reality to two ultimate substances: the spiritual and the material—or Thought and Extension, as he termed them. But, left with the need to explain how these two substances were held together, the good Catholic had dragged in the notion of God. To use the analogy offered by one of his disciples, Descartes seemed to teach that Mind and Body were like two clocks so arranged by the Creator that they always struck the same hour!

But Spinoza saw that such a scheme, though perhaps acceptable to liberal theologians, was untenable philosophically. If Thought and Extension were distinct substances, each ultimate in its own realm, then it was indeed necessary to resort to faith and assume the existence of some supernatural Controller. Otherwise, how was one to account for the apparent coherence in a universe so fundamentally divided? But to make such an assumption was to confess that reason alone could not explain the universe. It was to surrender everything to the traditionalists and the obscurantists who were forever thundering: "Canst thou by searching find out God?"

And, as the young rationalist tried to convince the rest in his circle, such a surrender was unthinkable. They had all broken with orthodoxy only because their minds had rebelled against accepting anything on faith. They had declared themselves worshippers of reason, refusing to bend the knee to any doctrine whose validity could not be rationally demonstrated. And if they were content with the Cartesian description of reality, then their break had been in vain—they were still resorting to faith! . . . No, Descartes had evidently gone astray somewhere. He had followed the right method, but had not followed it rightly. They must therefore start over again where he had started, and, using his same geometrical logic, try to arrive at an explanation of the universe which did not entail sheer assumptions.

It was evidently to this task that Spinoza addressed himself when he met of an evening with his friends. He sought to discover with them some means of eluding the dilemma inherent in Descartes' dualism. It was, however, by no means the only philosophic problem with which he struggled during this period. Nor the most urgent either. The task of discovering a rational explanation of the universe was an exercise in metaphysics —and in that the young man was interested only secondarily. Primarily he was interested in ethics, for to him it seemed the more immediate problem was not the nature of the universe but the purpose of man. Jew that he was, his dominant concern was the why of life rather than the how of existence. Science excited him, but as a means, not an end. True to his rearing, he could see only one worthy end for all human searching, and that end was the attainment of human happiness.

The point is cardinal, for it explains his whole career. His very break with the Jodenbuurt had been occasioned—fundamentally—not by abstract dissent but concrete dissatisfaction. He had become convinced that the way of life followed by his brethren could never lead to enduring joy. "Happy are they who dwell in Thy house," he had heard them recite each day in the synagogue—and he had come to see that at least for him such pious words were empty. So he had left his brethren. He had gone out into the world, alone and penniless, determined to find a house where he could be truly happy. And that search was what engrossed him now. Perhaps *obsessed* would be the truer word, for there was a touch almost of the frenetic in his searching. He confessed as much a few years later in his unfinished treatise entitled *On the Improvement of the Understanding.* In the stirring pages which open that work—they are altogether unlike anything else we have from his pen—he overcame his native reticence and told candidly of the torments he had once endured. There had been a time, he says—and he seems to be referring to the period immediately following his excommunication—when he lived in a "state of great peril." He was torn within himself, his mind inclining him to one course, and his flesh to another. Intellectually he was convinced that he could never be satisfied with the goods pursued by most men; yet he could not cease coveting those goods.

The young Jew's plight is readily comprehensible —more so, perhaps, than his eventual victory. He was no ascetic by nature, and it was not easy for him to resign himself to indigence. He was used to comfort—to warm shelter and plentiful food—and the lack of it was trying. His lens-grinding was slow, unprofitable labor, and could earn him barely enough to keep alive. He had to live now, one imagines, in some attic over a side-canal, where there was always an odor of stagnant water and stale beer. For food he could afford little more than gruel and an occasional herring, and he had to eat it, usually, off his work-bench. Buying books was out of the question; even new quills were an extravagance. And, though he had never known luxury and was free from costly tastes, he found such penury galling. Had he not been a fool, after all, to quarrel with his brethren? He could have been enjoying a pension of a thousand gulder all this while—enough to support him almost in luxury. He might have been betrothed by now to some rich man's daughter, or even married and settled in a home of his own. . . .

He was only flesh and blood, this young man who came of the Jodenbuurt, and he had desires which he saw no reason to repress. He, like any other normal male, would have liked a wife, and children, and a pleasant dwelling-place. Yet he had none of these things. He was a penniless outcast dwelling alone in a bare attic. He was nameless in the world, and without prospects. What could come of this life he was leading? He had learnt a trade—but could it ever bring him enough even for comfort? He had made a few friends among the Gentiles in the city—but could they ever be his brethren? . . . One imagines that more than once of a Sabbath eve, alone in his chill lodgings, he may have stared with longing in the direction of the Jodenbuurt. His brethren were rejoicing there at that hour. In each house the table was spread with glistening napery, the Sabbath lights were burning, and the wine cups were full. And the very youths with whom he had been reared were seated at those tables, householders now in their own right. They laid hands on the heads of their little ones while blessing them; they smiled across at their wives as they recited the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs. They ate and drank and prayed and sang songs—and were happy for the moment.

And he the while had to lurk in an attic, his table cluttered with the tools of his trade, his cup filled only with vinegar for the abrasive. He had no wife to beam at, no children to bless, no God to whom to give thanks. He was solitary and alone—and definitely *un*happy. This was no life for him, he may have groaned at such moments. The past was dead: he could nevermore be at ease in the ghetto. But why should be not try to be at ease in the world? Why not make money and attain renown among the Gentiles? Such things were not beyond his powers, he imagined. He could go into some counting-house and devote his wits to commerce. Or he could make the gesture of conversion, and apply for a post in a university. Why not? "I could well see the benefits which come with wealth and fame," he wrote in that significant autobiographical passage. His mind told him clearly enough how far more enduring might be the joys of the contemplative life; yet it was impossible "forthwith to renounce all love of riches, pleasure, and fame."

For a time he wondered whether he could not have both; but he finally saw that such a thing was impossible. The goods of the world and the goodly life were mutually exclusive. He could lay hold of the one, or seek the other; he could not conceivably have both. And with that settled, the question remained, which of the alternatives should he choose? The goods of the world? But what could they yield him? He pondered the question long and dispassionately, as every man should—and only a philosopher can. He listed those goods and then divided them into categories, the better to be able to appraise their worth. The objects desired by most men could be classified, he decided, under three main heads: Sensual Pleasure, Wealth, and Fame. Now, what enduring joy could any one of these provide him?

Sensual Pleasure, obviously enough, was delightful; but just as obviously it was fleeting. While it lasted it "enthralled the mind so that it could think of nothing else"; but once exhausted, an "extreme melancholy" ensued, leaving the mind "disturbed and torpid." So there was no stable happiness to be found in that. . . . What of wealth, then? The desire for it was not so easily exhausted, and its possession was not necessarily followed by revulsion. But in just that lay its root evil, for the desire for wealth could never really be satisfied, and the possession of it never at all accomplished. The more money one had, the more one wanted, so that the pursuit could yield not joy but frustration. . . . And fame was even more dubious a good, for not alone was the desire for it insatiable, but in addition the pursuit of it was annoying. As Spinoza could plainly see, those who hungered for acclaim "had to order their lives according to the opinions of their fellowmen." . . .

So what sense could there be in striving after any of those goods? As means to some superior good they might have their real worth; but as ends in themselves they were all "vain and futile." Far from engendering true happiness, the unbridled pursuit of pleasure, riches, or fame could yield only frustration and despair. It seemed wiser to forget all about them—"for when a vain thing is not desired, no quarrels can arise over it, no sadness felt if it perishes, no envy if it is possessed by another, no fear, no hatred—in short, no disturbances of the mind." Yes, it was obviously far wiser to forget all about such desires.

But that was easier said than done—as the young man well realized. It would have been less difficult had he known some nobler objective to strive for. But he did not. All he knew was that there *ought* to be a nobler objective. And so long as it remained hidden from him, he found it hard to keep from thinking of the ignoble ones. He did, however, discover one thing: the more he applied himself to seeking that nobler objective, the less he was tormented by the lure of ignoble ones. And this, says he, proved a great comfort to him. At least at moments he began to know the happiness which was his one absorbing desire. "And though these intervals were at first rare and fleeting," he tells us, "yet later, as the true good became more and more discernible to me, they grew more frequent and lasting." His torments waned. His mind became so wrapt in the search for the "true good" that he ceased to care if he was poor and an outcast. One passion consumed him: to discover "a new principle" which could make life really worth living. And in the steady glow of that passion he forgot all else.

One finds it difficult to explain such consecration. Spinoza was not the first man nor the last to turn his back on worldly desires. Hagiology is replete with instances of such conduct. But what distinguishes him is that he seems to have decided on that course not of a sudden and in hysteria, but gradually and with deliberation. He never experienced any spectacular conversion; he reasoned the thing out and made his choice in cold blood. And that is an achievement with very few parallels in history. What makes it the more inexplicable is the fact that this young Jew was not predisposed to abnegation. He came of a people who had a gusto for rich living, and there is no sign that he was lacking in normal wants of the flesh. Indeed, in one direction those wants may have been rather intense, for he came of highly-sexed stock, and his life was most sedentary. To be sure, he was sickly; but from all we know of his particular disease, it may have heightened rather than lessened his libido. Yet, so far as we can tell, he had no love-life either then or ever thereafter. There is a story, widely accepted until recent times, that he did once have a romance; but one can hardly give it much credence. Colerus is our only source for the bit of gossip. He writes:

> "Van den Ende had an only Daughter who understood the *Latin* Tongue as well as Musick so perfectly that she was able to teach her Father's Scholars in his absence. *Spinosa* having often occasion to see and speak to her, grew in Love with her, and he has often confest that he design'd to marry her. She was none the most Beautiful, but she had a great deal of Wit, a great Capacity and a jovial Humour, which wrought upon the Heart of *Spinosa,* as well as upon another Scholar whose name was *Kerkering,* a Native of Hamburg. The latter did soon perceive that he had a Rival . . . and it moved him to redouble his attendance upon his Mistress, which he did with good success. But a Neck-lace of Pearls, of the value of two or three hundred Pistoles, which he had before presented to that Young Woman, did without doubt contribute to win her Affection. She therefore promised to Marry him: Which she did faithfully perform when the Sieur *Kerkering* had abjured the *Lutheran* Religion, which he profest, and embraced the *Roman Catholick.* See the preface of *Kortholt de tribus Impostoribus,* of the 2nd Edition."

Now, if that reference in Kortholt is the sole authority for his tale, the good pastor was indulging in considerable license. The book to which he refers appeared originally soon after Spinoza's death, and denounced him together with Hobbes and Herbert of Cherbury as the "three great imposters." Twenty years later this book was republished by Kortholt's son, who added a preface containing a number of dubious biographical details. But the only mention it makes of Van den Ende's daughter is contained in an erroneous statement that Spinoza "learned the Latin language with avidity under the guidance and auspices of a learned young woman, together with Mr. Kerck . . . of Hamb, a pupil whom the teacher afterwards married." That is all the book has to say on the matter.

But even if Colerus derived his tale from some other source—perhaps the garrulous landlord, Van der Spyck—one still has every reason to doubt it. Van den Ende did indeed have a daughter named Clara Maria, and she did become the wife of Dirck Kerckrinck, who was for a time one of her father's students. But, as Van Vloten discovered half a century ago, the marriage did not occur until 1671, when Spinoza was already almost forty years of age! At the time the young Jew first came to Van den Ende for instruction, the girl was only ten or eleven; and when he later moved from Amsterdam, never to return save on three or four brief visits, she was still no more than sixteen! And that, of course, makes it exceedingly difficult to believe Colerus's story. Professor Freudenthal, loth to give up this solitary shred of romance in Spinoza's life, suggests that he may indeed have been in love with Clara Maria and may have actually asked her to be his wife when she was sixteen. And it was perhaps the rejection of his suit that prompted him to quit Amsterdam at that time. The learned biographer even detects an echo of the sad episode in the *Short Treatise* which Spinoza wrote soon afterwards, for there the philosopher declares: "He who loves transitory mortals is miserable; since in a love for such creatures lies poison and sorrow."

But the suggestion, like the exegesis, has little to commend it. Granted that he was indeed attracted to Van den Ende's daughter, Spinoza could hardly have entertained thoughts of taking her to wife. There was an ordinance forbidding marriage between a Jew and a Christian woman, and even if this did not apply to an excommunicated Jew, Baruch was still in no position to ask for her hand. He had no money, and no will to make any. And he was sickly, too. What had he to offer the girl?

No, having once set out on the quest for the grail of truth, the likelihood is that the tubercular youth made philosophy his bride, and books his only children. Rieuwertsz, his publisher, is reported to have said—and he was a shrewd and understanding man who knew Spinoza well—that the philosopher "never had any inclinations toward matrimony." That sounds far more credible than any romantic gossip. As Lucas suggests, "although not one of those austere people who look upon marriage as a hindrance to the activities of the mind, he nevertheless did not enter into its bonds . . . perhaps because the love of philosophy absorbed him completely." Spinoza evidently sublimated his erotic urge. He translated it from the physical plane to the mental, and exhausted it in feats of cogitation. He literally forgot himself in his work, and so completely that even the most careful psychoanalytic scrutiny can discover no sign of sex-frustration in his writings. It is true that in one place in the *Ethics* he refers to the genitals as the "parts of shame and excreta." But that was the language of the time, and he may only have used the phrase in order to emphasize the point he is making there.* It is true also that, in his analysis of the emotions, he seems to put Lust—which he definies as "desire and love in sexual intercourse"—in a class with Drunkenness and Avarice (Book III, Definition 48). But later in the work (Book V, Proposition 42), he gives to the term a connotation almost as generalized as the one given it by psychoanalysts today. Evidently this amazing man did not repress his libido; instead he succeeded in completely venting it in intellectual activity. It was apparently a case of perfect sublimation—as impressive a case as any to be found in all history. . . .

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* The passage reads: "For he who imagines that a woman he loves prostitutes herself to another, is not only saddened by the fact that his own desire is hindered, but also, since he is forced to unite the image of the being he loves with the parts of shame and excreta of his rival, he is turned from her." (Book III, Proposition 35, note.)

CHAPTER II

FOR four years the outcast Jew continued to dwell in Amsterdam, and then he could stand it no longer. "It was not persecution that drove him away," Lucas assures us, "but the love of solitude in which he knew he would discover the Truth." The overgrown city built on a marsh and wreathed in fog was no place for one with his constitution. Nor, what with its crowding and turmoil, was it a place for one with his interests. The tempo of life in the hustling, bustling, booming port made it difficult for him to think. In addition, his immediate circle of friends had by now grown too close for comfort. Those emancipated merchants who gathered in Rieuwertsz's bookshop, or perhaps Van den Ende's home, had come to look to Spinoza as their leader; and their demands on his time interfered with his own research. Fond as he may have been of those earnest and devoted followers, he felt he must leave them and find quiet.

So he moved to the country—to a village called Rijnsburg, about forty miles by water from Amsterdam. He

The main street of Rijnsburg.

evidently decided on that particular place because it was settled largely by Collegiants, and was no more than an hour and a half walk from Leyden. Those were considerable attractions in Spinoza's eyes, for, though in search of quiet, he had no desire to be cut off from human intercourse. Unlike for instance Descartes, who had lived for several years in the neighboring hamlet of Endegeest, the Jew had a horror of isolation. Born and bred in the ghetto, he could not, like the Frenchman, feel at home in the open countryside, with no more than a horse to keep him company and a gun to provide him with relaxation. Baruch needed human companionship.

He knew he would not lack it in a place inhabited by Collegiants, for the members of that sect were notoriously tolerant. Most of Spinoza's close friends during the past four years had belonged to that denomination, and it was no doubt at their suggestion that he chose Rijnsburg for his new home. They were, it is true, rather different from the type settled in the village, for the latter were largely peasants, or retired millers and shopkeepers. Yet even these humbler and unlettered sectarians were inclined to feel friendly toward a free-thinker. In part it was because they themselves were commonly considered free-thinkers. The Collegiants were an offshoot of the Arminians who had tried to liberalize the Calvinist theology earlier in the century. In particular these Arminians had rebelled against the doctrine of Predestination, and their agitation had led to such turmoil—political even more than religious—that they had finally been excommunicated by the Synod of Dordrecht. That happened in 1619, and led to the creation of a number of dissenting sects. One of the most vigorous of these was the Collegiants—so named because, in order to evade the anti-sectarian laws, they spoke of their congregations as "collegia" rather than churches. The movement had its origin in the village of Warmond, where two farmers named Van der Kodde began to hold regular services of hymn-singing and Bible-reading without benefit of clergy. As among the Quakers, there was no official preacher at these services; instead the worshippers themselves held forth according as the "Spirit" stirred them.

Thus was established the first of the "collegia"; and it was not long before many others sprang up in the land. In 1621 the center of the movement was carried over to Rijnsburg, where clerical power happened to be poorly entrenched; and there it flourished exceedingly. Men of high rank and learning were drawn to the sect—for instance, Koenraad van Beuningen, at one time the Mayor of Amsterdam; Adrian Paets, who served as ambassador to Spain; and Wagenaar, the historian, Joachim Oudaen, the poet, and a number of writers of lesser renown. In Amsterdam, as we have seen, a great many of the lay intellectuals were Collegiants. Yet the movement never lost the forthright and unstudied fervor which was from the first its most engaging quality. Its members refused to pay homage to titles or degrees.

When they gathered in their seasonal convocation at Rijnsburg, they chose a leader almost at random; and they expected him to acknowledge, before taking office, that he knew he was no better than the rest. Only righteousness and goodly deeds were impressive in their eyes. They spurned all ecclesiasticism and scorned all dogmas. Their one holy rite was baptism, which they administered by total immersion; but even that they did not hold to be obligatory. They were ready and eager to accept any good man into their fellowship, be he Jew, Turk, Atheist, or even Unitarian!

One can well understand, therefore, why Spinoza chose Rijnsburg for his retreat. It was a quiet place where he could work undisturbed, and yet where he might not lack kindly neighbors should he feel a need for company. It was a beautiful place, too—a cluster of low brick houses roofed with tiles and thatch, with a ruined abbey towering in its midst like a grandame nodding over her brood. All around stretched the flat acres of tilthland dotted with windmills and cut up by canals. Not far away meandered the last waters of the Rhine, a dispirited stream now that it had been tapped by the Maas. One of its turgid tributaries flowed right through the village, forming the high street and market-place. There stood the taverns and the *winkelhuisen,* some of them two-storied and boasting cranes, the rest little better than large-windowed huts. And running off from this main street were the winding, unpaved lanes which led past the village houses into the open fields.

On one of those side-streets, a crooked byway now called Spinoza Lane, stood the house where the philosopher found lodging. It is still there today, and is a museum dedicated to his memory: a small brick cottage with a steep slanting roof, and a lean-to at one end. Two stout alder trees stand before the door, and on the wall there is a tablet—a similar one was there in Spinoza's day—bearing a stanza from a popular Collegiant hymn:

"Ah, if only men would but be wise,
And would be good as well;
Then earth would be a Paradise—
Where now 'tis mostly Hell." *

Spinoza rented the house from a local chirurgeon named Herman Hamon. The price could not have been much, for it was a very modest dwelling. Save for the small attic which was reached by ladder-like steps, it contained no more than a central chamber and one small room on either side. Yet, compared with his lodgings in Amsterdam, this cottage must have seemed a veritable mansion. The philosopher spent the next three years of his life in it, and they were the most fruitful and perhaps the happiest he ever knew. He evidently did not have to give much of his time to his trade, for he could live very cheaply in this sequestered place. And his

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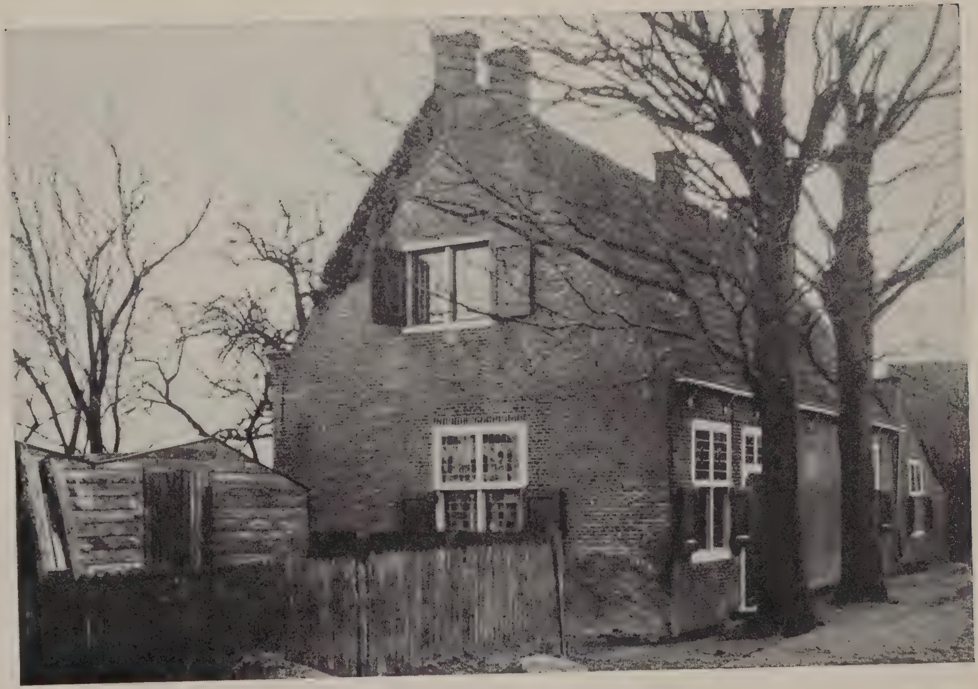
* *"Ach! Waren alle Menschen wijs*
En wilden daarbij wel!
De Aard' waar haar een Paradijs
Nu is ze meest een Hel."



HET SPINOZAHUIS IN RIJNSBURG

Spinoza lived in this cottage from 1660 to 1663.

health must have benefited by the country air. Above all, he was able to settle down at last to writing.

The first phase of his searching was over by the time he quitted Amsterdam. In Rijnsburg he no longer groped about for the "new principle"; he already had hold of it. And he was eager to make it known to others. Perhaps that was the chief reason why he left the city: he found the task of writing—which was arduous under the best of circumstances—quite impossible in so distracting an environment. He was not natively an articulate person, especially in Latin, which he had learnt when already grown up. He never ceased to try to master the tongue, as we can tell from the number of Latin grammars and lexicons which were found in his library when he died. Yet to the end of his days he was at a loss for words, and was betrayed into ambiguity, stilted phrasing, and errors in grammar. He simply had no innate feel for language.

Nor was this his only hindrance. Even had he had a distinct talent for expression, he would have found it difficult to express himself clearly. For what he had to say concerned the most profound and complicated problems of existence. His ideas did not lend themselves to exposition—especially to the type of exposition which Spinoza aspired to give them. He wanted to approach those ideas as might a mathematician, stating the problems in exact and unmistakable terms, and analyzing them with Euclidian precision. And that was difficult, almost impossible. Philosophic concepts were not as clear as mathematical symbols. Yet, impossible as it might be, he considered the task imperative, for it seemed to him that all his predecessors had gone astray largely because they neglected it. They had indulged in metaphor and hyperbole and all the other literary embellishments; and these had led them into error. They had operated on ideas much as the chirurgeons would operate on bodies—in an atmosphere crawling with sources of infection. And he wanted to change all that. He aspired to introduce asepsis into cogitation.

That was why he had to retreat into the country. He needed unbroken quiet in which to concentrate on the task of articulating his thoughts. And, happily, he found that quiet in Rijnsburg. No sooner was he settled there than he began to write an outline of his new-found philosophy which he entitled *A Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-being*. Evidently he had made attempts at such an outline while still in Amsterdam, and, with the husbandry characteristic of a tyro in composition, he inserted those earlier efforts into the manuscript. As a consequence, though he devoted all his first year in Rijnsburg to the treatise, it emerged in the end a thing of patches. But that apparently did not disturb him much, for he had no thought of publishing the work. At most he intended it as an outline for his friends in Amsterdam, and he knew they would overlook its uneven character.

His own profit from the work lay in the chance it gave him to experiment with various literary forms. His problem, now that he knew what he had to say, was to discover how best to say it. His first efforts had evidently been in the medium of the philosophic dialogue, which still retained much of the popularity it had enjoyed during the Renaissance. But he seems to have found the task of inventing neat retorts too laborious for one of his talents, and before long he fell back on what might be termed skeletal exposition. The treatise as it has come down to us opens in that form. The book begins:

> "CHAPTER ONE: THAT GOD EXISTS.
>
> As regards the first, namely, whether there is a God, this we say, can be proved.
>
> 1. In the first place, *a priori* thus:
>   i. Whatever we clearly . . ."

And it continues thus for some sixty lines before it at last expands into connected sentences. Even then, however, the style continues to be laconic and jerky—save in two rambling dialogues which are inserted—until at last, in one of the appendices, it takes on a definitely geometrical pattern. That pattern, as we shall see, became Spinoza's favorite form of exposition. He preferred it to all others because with its precise arrangement of axioms, propositions, proofs, and corollaries, it seemed ideal for his purposes. He did not care that it made his work uninviting to the casual reader; he was not interested in the casual reader. His first desire was to say what he had to say as logically and unambiguously as possible; and if none save trained intellects could follow him, so much the better. What this free-thinker had to say was not meant for common minds. He was offering meat for strong men, not milk for sucklings.

To tell in any detail just what it was that Spinoza had to say, would carry us far afield. This is a biography, not a philosophic commentary, and we must confine ourselves to the facts of his life. Yet some discussion of his thought is indispensable, for without it the facts of his life are almost irrelevant. If Spinoza is still one "whose name makes so great noise in the world," it is solely because he had so great a mind. It is therefore imperative that we turn aside at least for a moment to learn what that mind discovered.

Few documents in all the literature of speculative thought are more formidable, at first glance, than those in which Spinoza sought to expound his philosophy. To the unaccustomed eye they seem to be nothing but bleak and bloodless dissertations on concerns too remote to have human import. But actually they are the very reverse of that. Once one has become familiar with their terminology, one discovers that they are not at all abstract exercises in metaphysics, but impassioned explorations into the most intimate problems of everyday life. If both the *Short Treatise* and the *Ethics* begin with a discussion of the nature of the universe, it is only because their author was intent on revealing the more clearly the true character of man. Spinoza's ultimate interest always was in man; but, since man is part of the universe, he realized that any understanding of human conduct must be based on a knowledge of the universe itself. He had to think out all things to their ultimate meaning, discovering their place and value in the entire scheme of reality. Therefore he had to start out with what, for want of a better term, he called God.

But not the God worshipped in churches and synagogues. No, Spinoza's God is the elemental Substance, the stuff and essence of all that exists. The conception is not easy to grasp; but it is cardinal. According to Spinoza, the universe is all essentially of one piece, and the things we see in and around ourselves are all related. To call some of them things of the Spirit (or Thought), and others, things of matter (or Extension), is to point out a purely superficial distinction between them. At bottom the thinking world, the mechanical world, and perhaps other such worlds of which our minds cannot conceive, are all really aspects of one world. Fundamentally all things, whether men or trees or stones or dreams, are but part of a single homogeneous reality. And this reality Spinoza called God. He might have called it Nature; and he did at times. ("*Deus sive Natura,* God or Nature," is a common expression of his in the *Short Treatise.*) But for reasons which readily suggest themselves—but which are not necessarily correct—he preferred the religious term.

Yet he never ceases to emphasize the point that this God of his has nothing in common with the deity of the orthodox. There is nothing transcendent about the Ultimate. It is not a spirit hovering over the earth, but the "idea" of the earth itself, and of all that is in and around the earth. There is therefore nothing anthropomorphic about it. This God could no more become incarnate itself in a man than—to use Spinoza's own analogy—a circle could assume the nature of a square. Nor is there any aspect of personality about it. To call it Father, Judge, or King of kings is preposterous; to praise it is no less impertinent than to blame it. Spinoza has nothing but scorn for those people—he is thinking, as he says, of his own erstwhile brethren in particular—who "if they make money in a transaction, say God gave it to them, or if they desire anything, say God has disposed their hearts toward it, or if they think anything, say God told it to them."

No, the God of Spinoza knows no obligation to man; it is utterly indifferent to him. It no more created man than the plans and specifications created the bridge which was built according to them. And it no more sustains man than the bridge is sustained by the mathematical equations expressing the laws of stress and strain. This God of Spinoza's is in no sense a Personal Being; it is a logical concept. It is the name for that all-embracing, all-pervading Essence which inheres in all that exists.

Therefore man can be no more than a detail in the cosmic scheme—a detail absolutely of no greater importance than any other. Man is merely a "particular mode," a finite manifestation, of the Infinite. All so-called things, whether grubs or empires or stars, are likewise "particular modes." They may seem to us altogether distinct from each other, belonging to different orders of reality—but that is only because our sight is dim. Essentially they are all bound together in one homogeneous whole. They are—to use Professor Erdmann's illustration—like ever-changing waves in an unchanging sea. Each wave is indeed an entity, but only because there are other waves to define and limit it. By itself it is not a wave at all, but simply some of the sea. Therefore any finite thing can be viewed from two aspects: first, in relation to other finite things, and second, in relation to the Infinite. The one aspect is the "incidental," the other is the "essential"; the first reveals the transient in a thing, and the second the eternal.

Now human beings also can be viewed from these two aspects. As a thing among things, caused, sustained, and destroyed by them, we are altogether finite and transient. The universe does not exist for our benefit any more than the sea exists for the benefit of any of its waves. We are merely incidents in the total scheme of things—and incidents altogether determined by that scheme. The universe of which we are all a part is governed by immutable laws from which there is no exemption. (Were it otherwise, then all scientific research would be impossible, for the basis of such research is the assurance that, given certain causes, certain effects must inevitably follow.) Man is not the captain of his life's destiny—not even a deck-hand on the raft of a day's circumstance. Nothing he does is casual; everything is necessarily caused. A human being, indeed, has no more free-will than a stone hurled through the air. He may *think* he has free-will. But that is only because, like the stone in mid-air, he does not know what forces propel him. He may pride himself that he can, as he puts it, "change his mind." But in reality his mind is changed *for* him. For man is but one wave in the infinite sea, and whatever he does is absolutely conditioned by the waves around him.

But that is only one aspect of the matter. Man is an incident only so long as he is viewed with relation to other incidents. But viewed with relation to the Infinite Essence, he is himself infinitely essential. He is no longer a prisoner in the toils of circumstance; he partakes of the illimitable freedom of the infinite universe. He is no longer a fleeting manifestation; he is part of the eternal scheme of things. The wave falls, but the sea remains; the individual must die—in body and soul alike—but God endures.

And once a man understands this, he is saved. Once he realizes, says Spinoza, that he is a part of the whole of Nature, then "he is rid of Sorrow, Despair, Envy, Terror, and other evil passions which constitute the real hell itself." No matter how hard his lot, he feels no bitterness. He realizes that he is what he is, and that to complain because he is not something else—say an athlete instead of a cripple, or a genius instead of a fool—is as absurd as "it would be for a circle to complain because God had not endowed it with the properties of a sphere."

That does not mean, however, that man must lie down and accept without a struggle whatever comes his way. No, it is inherent in his nature, as it is in the nature of every other finite thing, to want to preserve himself and thus fulfil his destiny. Therefore it is necessary that he shall always strive after those things which are most conducive to his preservation and self-fulfillment. If he fails, then it is not his fault, for in the economy of this ordered universe it was evidently *fated* that he should fail. . . . Why he should thus be fated may be a mystery—but only because man is ignorant of the workings of the whole universe. Could he but know those workings, then he would realize that what seems to be an injustice to him is, after all, a right and proper and absolutely necessary thing so far as the entire cosmos is concerned. But though it is not a man's fault if he fails, it is nevertheless his misfortune. "One who goes mad from the bite of a dog is excusable," says Spinoza, "yet it is right that he should die of suffocation." Similarly one who is incapable of fulfilling his destiny as a man, is blameless; but he suffers nonetheless. He is tormented by greed or remorse or a sense of frustration; in a word, he is damned.

How, then, is a man to fulfil his destiny? Obviously it is by accommodating himself as best he can to the infinite scheme of things. To use a phrase as old as Lao-Tze, it is by bringing himself "in tune with the Eternal." And to accomplish this a man must forget ephemeral "goods" and think only of the enduring "good." In other words, he must be virtuous. Not in order to obtain a reward in some other world. No, virtue is its own reward here and now. For to be virtuous is to live in accordance with the laws of Nature, and to live in accordance with the laws of Nature is to fulfil one's destiny as a part of Nature—and he that thus fulfils his destiny enjoys enduring happiness!

It is not easy to find flaws in Spinoza's reasoning. Once you accept his monistic conception of the universe—and his demonstration of that monism is a masterpiece of deductive logic—then you are forced to follow him through to the very last of his conclusions. In a monistic universe, says he, everything must ultimately fit to perfection; and if a man fails to see this, it is solely because he is looking, so to speak, through the wrong end of the telescope. Once he fastens his gaze on the Infinite rather than the finite, once he learns to see all things "under the form of eternity," then he realizes that *on the whole* the universe is perfect.

That does not mean he will become a smirking optimist, and will go around carolling of alrightness of the details. He will not say, for example, that pain is imaginary or that death is an illusion. No, such things will remain very real to him—*but they will not be im-*

portant. So far as is within his power he will try to rid himself of such afflictions by living his finite life intelligently and virtuously. He will explore the realms of biology and psychology in order to discover the causes of those afflictions; and he will strive so to order his life as to remove all he can of those causes. But, since what he learns in this way will relate only to finite things—for no science can explore the Infinite—he will never be able to remove *all* the causes. For instance, no matter how much he searches, he will never be able to find a way to keep from dying. Therefore—if he is a wise man—he will reconcile himself to his limitations. He will not delude himself with the hope of a personal immortality. Nor will he say that unless he is promised such immortality, he will act like a beast here and now. To do so would be as silly, says Spinoza, as for a fish to say that unless it is promised eternal life in some other element, it will leave the water now and go on land!

No, it is man's lot to be born and to die as one finite part of infinite Nature; and to ask for more is for him to ask to live "outside his element." If he, as an individual, is limited, at least the God of whom he is a part is not limited. And in the realization of that truth must he find his happiness. Moreover, he *can* find it there, if only the realization is sufficiently keen. If a man will but "love God intellectually"—that is, if he will but respond with heart and head to the fact that he is an integral part of the whole of Nature—then he will cease to be tormented by a sense of frustration. No matter what evils befall him, his mind will be serene. He will fulfil his destiny to perfection—and he will be supremely, completely, enduringly happy. . . .

Such in brief was the "new principle" expounded by Spinoza.* Its main tenets were evidently already firmly fixed in his mind when he wrote the *Short Treatise* in his late twenties; and, save for some modification and much amplification, they remained with him until he died. That he was not the first to conceive them is as obvious as it is inconsequential. Even the ancient Hindus talked of a single Essence permeating the universe, and many Occidental thinkers from Xenophanes to Giordano Bruno taught a similar doctrine. One finds it cardinal also to medieval mysticism, especially in the writings of Meister Eckhart and the anonymous *Theologia Germanica.* The Kabalists, too, were more or less committed to this idea, as were also certain of the Jewish rationalists. Ibn Ezra, for example, had actually read the doctrine into the Bible, interpreting the Scriptural "cleaving" of man to God as the union of part with whole. And Leon Abarbanel (Hebreu) in his *Dialogues on Love*—a work which was found in Spinoza's library when he died—had literally declared that an "intellectual love" binds man to God.

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* For obvious reasons we have been able to give only the barest gist of Spinoza's philosophy. The reader interested in pursuing the subject further, will find a number of works in the English language to aid him. One of the most recent and comprehensible is Leon Roth's *Spinoza,* 1929. A fuller but more difficult book is Richard McKeon's *Philosophy of Spinoza,* 1928. The works by Pollock, Martineau, and Caird are, of course, well known. These and a number of others are listed in the bibliography at the close of this volume.

But all that is of no real import. Undoubtedly Spinoza derived the elements of his philosophy from earlier writers. The oft-repeated statement that he "thought much but read little" is nonsense. He read voraciously—the list of books among his effects when he died is evidence enough of that—and he obviously retained what he read. One can without much difficulty trace the direct derivations not alone of most of Spinoza's ideas, but even of many of his phrases. But what of it? As Goethe once said of such scholarly prying: "As well might one inquire of a well-nourished man as to the oxen, sheep, and pigs he had consumed and from which he had drawn his strength." To change the metaphor, Spinoza's philosophy may not have been "all sculptured from the sculptor's brain." Yet it was nevertheless his own distinctive product. Others may have rough-hewn the stones, but it was he who made of them a monument. Even when as a young man in his twenties he first outlined that heroic pile, it was already a unique creation. There was a coherence in his system, a close-knit cogency and impregnable logic, that made it peculiarly his own. It was neither Kabalism, nor Cartesianism, nor Monism, nor Pantheism, nor Pancosmism—it was *sui generis* Spinozism.

And he himself well realized this. He did not claim that his system of thought was sanctioned by sacrosanct authority. He did not try to read it into the Bible, or into Plato, Aristotle, or Descartes. (His disciples have done it for him.) All he claimed for it was the sanction of reason, and if it was unprecedented as a system, he saw no cause to disguise the fact. "Be not astonished at these novelties," he begged his Amsterdam friends when he sent them the manuscript of his *Short Treatise:* "a thing is not untrue simply because it has not been accepted by the multitude." . . .

But if Spinoza was aware of the novelty of his thought, he was no less aware of its subversiveness. The intellectual climate had changed greatly since the time Giordano Bruno had to be put to death for equating God with Nature. But the mists of credulity still hung low over the world, and even in Holland it was not safe to try to dispel them. The Protestant republic, like any Catholic monarchy, was popularly regarded as a theocracy: an institution created by Divine Providence and governed by Divine ordinances. Therefore whoever presumed to question the existence of a Divine Being was not merely an eccentric—he was guilty of treason. And Spinoza's philosophy did more than question the reality of such a Being; it ruled it out as sheer superstition. True, it offered in His place another sort of God. But this other one was not a deity—he was a deduction. One could not pray to Spinoza's God and expect answer; one could not praise him in the hope of reward. He could not work miracles for those he favored, or send afflictions to those he blamed. He was utterly indifferent to man, as indifferent to him as to a minnow in the sea or to a fleck of cloud in the sky. Therefore he was pragmatically no God at all. And to dare to set him in the place of the Almighty Ruler worshipped by the populace was worse than blasphemy—it was sedition.

Spinoza, we say, was well aware of this, and it is clear that it disquieted him. He indulged in no incendiary speech in the *Short Treatise;* on the contrary, he expounded his ideas in language that was almost pious. (In the eyes of the fiery eighteenth century intellectuals that was one of Spinoza's worst faults. Voltaire, for instance, described him disdainfully as a timid, little, long-nosed creature who sneaks up to the Supreme Being and whispers apologetically, "Excuse me, but I think that you do not exist!") Nevertheless what was said in that book was, Spinoza realized, far too heterodox to be made public. And he took care to make this known to those to whom he entrusted the manuscript. In the closing paragraph he wrote:

> "The character of the age in which we live is not unknown to you, and therefore I entreat you most earnestly to be very cautious about communicating these ideas to others. I do not want to say that you should keep them absolutely to yourselves; but if ever you should begin to communicate them to others, I ask only that you be prompted by no interest save your neighbor's happiness." . . .

His entreaty was obeyed, and so well that for almost two centuries the work was literally hidden from sight. For a while it circulated secretly in manuscript among the members of Spinoza's circle in Amsterdam, and then it simply disappeared.* But that was precisely what its author desired. In the first place, he regarded the *Short Treatise* as no more than a preliminary draft, and therefore unworthy of publication. In the second place, he knew it was a very radical document, and, for one in his position, far too daring for publication. So he was glad to have it remain secret. There was nothing of the exhibitionist in the young Jew, and he had no craving for spectacular martyrdom. The seal which he designed for himself later in life bore the one word *Caute,* "Caution"—and it was a most appropriate motto for one such as he. Caution characterized his conduct throughout his life, and most of all now when he was still obscure and unprotected. It was not that he was a coward; he was simply discreet. As we shall see, when sufficiently provoked he could forget discretion and lay about him furiously. (*Caute,* one must realize, could also be translated "Beware!") But for the present he saw no need for recklessness. His ideas, he believed, were unchallengeably true; and, being so true, they would *have* to prevail. There was therefore no reason for impatience. He could afford to bide his time.

He did. He sent off the manuscript to his trusted friends in Amsterdam, and then quietly began to work on another book. And because of this discretion on his part he was left undisturbed. Few, if any, of the villagers had any sure knowledge of his opinions. To them he was probably just a humble scholar, a bit eccentric, of course, but altogether inoffensive. They may have been a little suspicious of him when he first settled in their midst, for his dark complexion and courtly manners were strange in the sequestered village. Besides, it was no doubt remarked that there was often a light in his house long after good folk were abed, and his neighbors may have wondered what kept him up so late. But before long their suspicions vanished. They found him, reports Bayle, "a man with whom it was good to associate, affable, honest, obliging, and very correct in his morals." *

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* Not until some eighty years ago, when two manuscript copies of an early Dutch translation turned up in Holland, was the work finally made public. Prof. A. Wolf's excellently annotated English version of the *Short Treatise,* together with a short biography of Spinoza, was first published in 1910.

Not that the villagers saw much of him. When he left his house, it was usually to wander alone along the quiet lanes, or to sun himself on the bank of a stream. Perhaps he took such walks frequently, for the meadow air was sweet in his town-cramped lungs, and the beauty of the landscape was good to see. The ideas that had burgeoned in his mind while in the city seemed to acquire almost a sensory affirmation here in the open countryside. The flat tilthland reaching out to the far horizon seemed to sing aloud of the unity of all that existed; the lapping of the water in the canals, the soughing of the wind in

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* "This is strange," comments Bayle with obvious slyness, "but at bottom it is no more astonishing than to see people who live very immorally despite that they believe devoutly in the gospels." . . .

the rushes, seemed to breathe it endlessly. What in Amsterdam had been a purely intellectual conception, became here veritably a physical conviction.

It was probably alone, however, that he took these strolls, for meditation was impossible otherwise. Yet if he encountered anyone, be it a gentleman on horseback or a peasant clumping by in wooden shoes, the young Jew was always ready with a friendly greeting. And this quite dispelled the dread with which the countryfolk might otherwise have regarded him. When they met him occasionally in the village store, they may even have stopped to chat with him a moment. And certainly they must have wished him God's grace when they saw him at their religious services. He seems to have attended those services with some frequency, for there was a fervor in them which attracted him. He did not believe there was a Heavenly Father who could hear and answer prayer, nor did he imagine for a moment that a supernatural "Spirit" was present in the chapel at prayer-time. Yet he was not in the least disdainful of those who did believe such things. Years later, when his pious landlady in The Hague asked him his opinion of her religion, he is reported to have answered:

> "Your religion is a good one; you need not look for another, nor doubt that you may be saved by it—provided that while you apply yourself to piety, you at the same time live a peaceable and quiet life."

And that tolerant spirit—all too rare among freethinkers—seems to have marked his demeanor when he lived in Rijnsburg. He liked these pious sectarians dwelling in the village, for if they were not learned, they were at least honest and peace-loving. They allowed no stilted preaching at their services, but only spontaneous prayer and song; and these were naive exercises which even a confirmed rationalist could enjoy. So Spinoza spent many a Sunday morning in the local chapel.

But save for such occasional encounters, the villagers could have seen little of their strange neighbor. He had work to do, and it was work that kept him largely indoors. Having roughly outlined his whole philosophy, his next task was to tell in detail how he had arrived at it. He therefore set to work on an ambitious essay entitled *On the Improvement of the Understanding*, which was to elucidate his line of reasoning much as the *Discourse on Method* had elucidated Descartes', and the *Novum Organum* had elucidated Bacon's. Accordingly, following the example set by Descartes, he began the treatise with a fragment of autobiography. We have already referred to this passage in our account of Spinoza's spiritual development before he finally quitted Amsterdam. Experience had taught him, he tells us, that "all the usual elements of social life are vain and futile." This experience, of course, had been largely vicarious. As we have already surmised, he had looked about him during those bitter months of uncertainty following his excommunication, and had seen how little his fellowmen profited by their ravening after pleasure, riches, and fame. And the sight had moved him to inquire whether there might be some better objective in life—"something which, when discovered and attained, would enable me to enjoy continuous, supreme, and unending happiness."

What difficulties he encountered while pursuing that inquiry, we learnt in the preceding chapter of this chronicle. But at last his tenacious struggles were rewarded. After long pondering he did discover an objective which promised to provide him with enduring happiness. He saw that "the greatest good is that a man, together with other men if possible, should arrive at a knowledge of the union existing between the [individual] mind and the whole of Nature."

Now to arrive at this supreme knowledge, Spinoza went on to say, we must first acquire a fuller knowledge of ourselves and the world around us. We must develop the sciences; especially—and the selection is significant—Medicine ("for health," says he, "is no slight means of attaining our end,") and Technology ("for many arduous tasks are rendered easy by inventions, and thus we gain much leisure and convenience.") But before we can develop the sciences, we must first learn how to distinguish between truth and falsehood. "Means must be devised," says he, "for improving the understanding . . . so that it can apprehend things without error."

It was to suggest such a means of "improving the understanding" that Spinoza began to write this treatise.

He wanted to chart a course for man in his quest for truth, a course both direct and certain. Francis Bacon had essayed the task in his *Novum Organum* about a half-century earlier, and his influence had become paramount in the scientific world. Bacon had insisted that the one approach to truth was by means of observation and induction. "Nothing really exists in nature," he had maintained, "save individual acts obeying a fixed law." Accordingly, in order to discover the law we must first observe the acts. We must forget tradition, neglect introspection, and do nothing but observe and experiment with the "facts of Nature." To all of which most of the scientists of the day cried, Amen.

Spinoza, however, was skeptical. He could well appreciate the value of empiricism, and he himself had already tried his hand at experiments of a scientific nature. In later years he gave more and more of his leisure to such experiments, and not alone in the field of optics—in which, says Lucas, he would have discovered "the most beautiful secrets" had his investigations not been cut short by death—but also in mechanics, hydrostatics, astronomy, and zoölogy. Colerus informs us that the philosopher while living in The Hague would often divert himself for hours by watching the habits of spiders, and by "observing with a Microscope the different parts of the smallest Insects." And, as we shall see, much of Spinoza's correspondence dealt primarily with problems in science.

But though he realized the importance of concrete observation, he realized also its impotence. He saw, for one thing, that such observation, while it could gauge the quantity of a thing, could never gauge its quality. By means of it one might be able to describe the nature and process of an object, but never its essential value or final significance. And, for another thing, concrete observation could not be the ideal method of inquiry because in an infinite universe there must be an infinite number of particular facts, and one could never hope to observe enough of them to arrive at safe generalizations. Therefore the whole direction of inductive reasoning—from the particular to the general—seemed mistaken to Spinoza. The right direction, he insisted, was that of *de*ductive reasoning. The inquiring mind is not entirely passive, waiting to receive sense-impressions before it can bestir itself to draw conclusions. On the contrary, it is active, anticipating nature so to speak, and leaping at hypotheses which it will abandon only if the sense-impressions cannot be made to fit them. Therefore the surer method of attaining truth is to reason not from isolated facts discovered by observation, but from what Spinoza called "clear ideas" grasped intuitively. Not sight so much as insight can reveal the essential elements of reality. One must lay hold of the fundamental postulates involved in the constitution of the universe—they cannot be many in so well-ordered a scheme—and from these deduce other postulates. For thus alone can one arrive unfailingly at the truth.

There are four grades of knowledge, Spinoza declared in this essay. (In the *Short Treatise* he had combined the first two grades, making only three in all; and he reverted to that arrangement later in the *Ethics*.) The first is altogether unreliable, being derived from mere hearsay concerning facts. The second is likewise unsafe, being based on uncritical observation of facts. Not until we reach the third grade, the "scientific," do we have dependable knowledge, for here the facts are not haphazardly looked at, but carefully scrutinized, selected, and classified. But even this is not the supreme form of knowledge, said Spinoza. There is still a fourth grade—the knowledge which is based not so much on empirical examination of individual facts as on an intuitive understanding of their essential relationships. It is the perception which comes from within rather than from without, the fruitage not of sight but insight. It is philosophic rather than scientific knowledge, and casts light into places where the empiricist is utterly lost. It does not analyze, it synthesizes; it does not describe, it interprets. Indeed, it is more than knowledge—it is wisdom. And therefore it is on this fourth grade that we must ultimately rely if we would arrive at the essential truth.

The contention was important—and only after three centuries of rampant empiricism are we beginning to appreciate its importance—but at the same time it was not easy to establish. What made it most vulnerable as a theory was the difficulty in ascertaining the decisive criteria of this intuitive knowledge. Spinoza seems to have struggled with that problem for months, and at last he gave it up in despair. After writing—and apparently rewriting and rewriting—some fifteen thousand words of his essay on the understanding, he found himself lost in a colossal logical derangement. He saw that he could not properly expound his theory of knowledge unless he first elucidated his whole system of metaphysics. So finally he had to put the essay aside. He did not confess himself finally defeated. No, he had every intention of returning to the task at some future time. Indeed, from the way in which he referred to the essay when writing to his friends, he evidently thought of it as already almost finished.

But, as we shall see, he never did return to it. To this day it remains a torso.

HENRY OLDENBURG
from the portrait at the Royal Society of London.

CHAPTER III

THE character of Spinoza's life in Rijnsburg had changed profoundly by the time the essay on the understanding was put aside. The seclusion which he had been able to enjoy when he first moved there two years earlier, had long since ceased. His presence in the village had become noised about in near-by Leyden, and students from the University had learnt to seek him out where he lived. Perhaps they were drawn at first by curiosity, for an infidel Jew dwelling in a community of pious Collegiants was no ordinary spectacle. But it was not long before they began to resort to him for other reasons. They discovered he was not simply an eccentric free-thinker, but a man of extraordinary brilliance and learning. He knew Hebrew as did none of the professors of theology in the University. And he was a master of the "new philosophy" as well. And with it all he was modest beyond words, beautifully courteous, and ever eager to converse on learned matters.

All these virtues—report of which, no doubt, spread swiftly in the University circles—had begun to attract to him an increasing throng of visitors. Not alone students came to call on the learned recluse; occasionally even noted scholars, who heard tell of him while passing through Leyden. For instance, there was the distinguished Henry Oldenburg, who was later to become a secretary of the Royal Society of London. Oldenburg was a German gentleman of leisure who enjoyed travelling from land to land in order to interview philosophers and scientists. He was a sort of bee in the garden of knowledge, busily carrying the pollen of novel ideas from one investigator to another. Happening to stop over in Leyden on one of his journeys, he learnt from the professors there of the presence of the erudite lens-grinder in the neighboring village. And, evidently impressed by the reports they gave him, he actually went out of his way to visit the curious scholar.

Spinoza may have been no little impressed when he saw the distinguished-looking foreigner alight at his cottage door. Oldenburg was a large, stout man many years his senior, clad as became a gentleman of affairs—he had served as a diplomat in England for some time—and wearing an aristocratic smear of a moustache on his heavy upper lip. Compared with him the stoop-shouldered young Jew must have looked very small indeed, and no doubt very poor in his humble raiment. But after the first formal interchange of compliments, the two men quickly warmed to each other. Spinoza's customary caution fell away from him completely. He became convinced that he need keep nothing from this visitor, for the German was obviously enlightened and sympathetic. Though he had been schooled in Christian theology—Oldenburg had taken his master's degree in the subject about the time Spinoza entered the Hebrew school on the Burgwal—he seemed utterly rid of orthodox ideas. And the young free-thinker unburdened himself freely. He tried to explain his objections to both the Baconian and the Cartesian principles, and the reasons why his own seemed to him more logical. He talked of his God who was the equivalent of Nature, and of how Thought and Extension were but two of this God's manifestations. He tried to prove that the soul and the body were no more than different aspects of a single reality, and that they corresponded with each other as perfectly and necessarily as the convexity on one side of a curve corresponds with the concavity on the other. For hours he talked on, his lean frame no doubt swaying—had he not spent most of his life in a yeshivah?—and his large dark eyes aglow with enthusiasm. Oldenburg may have had difficulty in understanding his speech, compounded as it probably was of Latin, Dutch, and German for the occasion. Besides, the lordly visitor was not quite prepared for such novel ideas. But if he was bewildered, he gave no sign of it. Clearly he was much impressed by this odd young Jew who could reason so methodically and yet arrive at such bizarre conclusions. And when at last he took his departure, he was full of regrets that he could not hear more.

How profoundly he was impressed we can gather from the letter which he wrote to Spinoza a few weeks later. Oldenburg, it should be explained, was an inveterate correspondent—that was why he was appointed one of the secretaries when the Royal Society of London was organized—for he saw that the great need of the day was for "a commerce in all parts of the world with the most philosophical and curious persons to be found everywhere." It was only natural, therefore, for him to want to keep in touch with the queer lens-grinder whom he had come across in Holland.

> "Very illustrious Sir, Honored Friend," he saluted him: "So reluctantly did I tear myself away from your side recently when I was with you at Rijnsburg, that no sooner am I back in England than I strive, as far as possible, to rejoin you at least by an exchange of letters. Solid learning coupled with humanity and nobility of character—with all of which Nature and Industry have most amply endowed you—provide such attractions of their own that they win the love of all men who are open-minded and liberally educated. Come then, most excellent Sir, and let us join our right hands in unfeigned friendship. . . . We conversed . . . as through a lattice, and only in a hurry, and as [the problems] continue to crucify my mind, let me venture to plead with you by right of the friendship begun between us, and ask you very cordially to set forth your ideas somewhat more fully. . . . The more freely you write to me on these and similar subjects, the more closely will you bind me to you; and you will strongly put me under obligation to render equivalent services, if only I can. . . . There are already in the press *Certain Physiological Essays,* written by a certain English Noble, a man of excellent erudition. . . . As soon as they are printed I shall see to it that they are delivered to you by a friend who is probably

> crossing the sea shortly. . . . Meanwhile farewell, and keep in memory your friend who is,
>
> Yours in all love and devotion,
> Henry Oldenburg." *

Spinoza lost no time in answering. He may have realized that the "love and devotion" which were being extended to him were largely academic. It was the custom in that day for scholars to write each other what Malpighi called "epistolary dissertations"—much as it is now their custom to send each other complimentary reprints of their monographs published in learned journals. But though Oldenburg's gesture was formal and impersonal, it was nevertheless flattering. And Spinoza replied:

> ". . . I seem to myself to be not a little bold in that I dare to enter into friendship with you . . . but the step must be attributed to your humanity and benevolence rather than to me. From the height of this humanity you have been willing to lower yourself and to enrich me with the abundance of your benevolence to such an extent that I do not fear to enter into that close friendship which you steadfastly offer me, and which you deign to ask from me in return. . . . With regard to my mental endowments, if I possess any, I should most willingly allow you to make a

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* This letter, like all the others from which we shall have occasion to quote, is to be found in Prof. A. Wolf's excellently annotated English translation of Spinoza's *Correspondence*. That work contains all the letters written by Spinoza (49) or to him (37) which have been discovered to date. The collection would be far less incomplete had not Spinoza's literary executors destroyed a number of his letters, and censored portions of those which they published, out of fear of persecution by the Dutch authorities of the time. Happily, however, recent discoveries of copies of certain letters have aided modern scholars to repair some of the damage done by those executors.

> claim upon them, even if I knew it would be to my great detriment. . . ."

And, having thus returned Oldenburg's bows and genuflexions, the young philosopher proceeded to indite a thousand-word dissertation explaining certain of the ideas about which his correspondent expressed bewilderment. Plainly enough, Spinoza took great pains over that epistle. The writing is small and neat, and there are none of the erasures and corrections which are to be found in his letters to his more intimate friends.

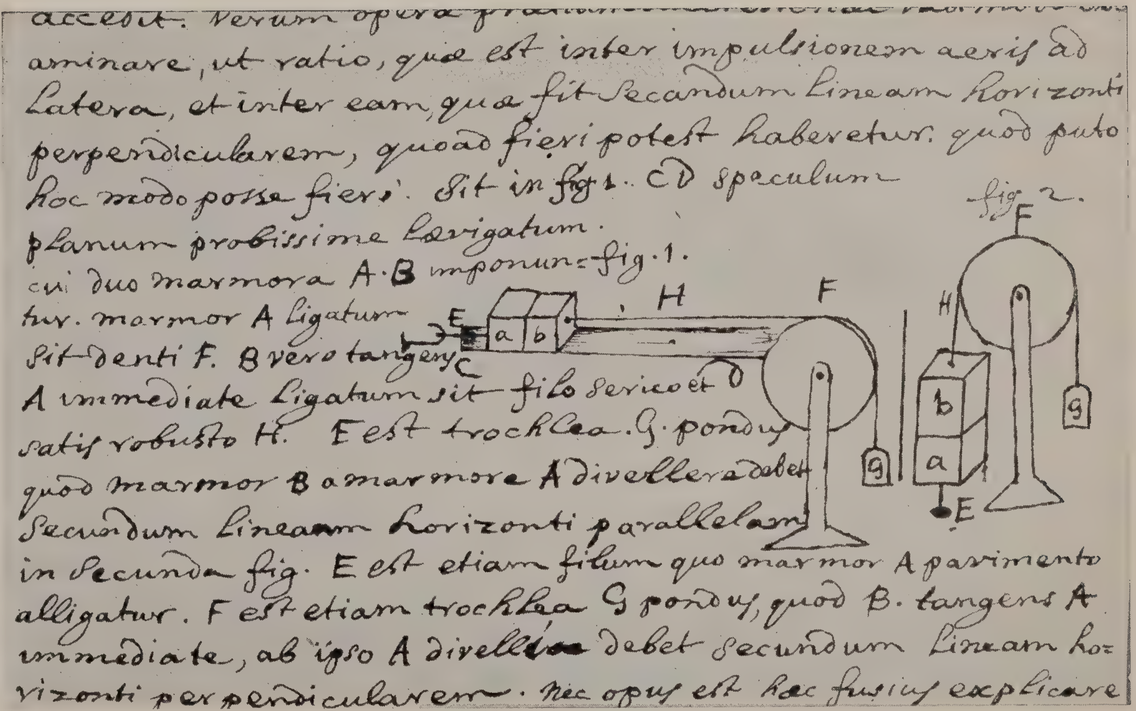
And that was only the beginning of his correspondence with Oldenburg. Within a few weeks he received a second letter asking him for further explanation of his ideas.

"I warmly approve your geometric method of proof," wrote Oldenburg; "but at the same time I blame my own dulness that I do not so promptly grasp what you so accurately teach. Permit me, I pray, to present the evidence of this stupidity of mine, by presenting the following questions. . . ."

There followed a series of searching inquiries, and then the significant assurance:

> "I beg you most earnestly to be fully persuaded that all these matters which you deign to impart to me will remain inviolate and safe, and that I shall not do anything to let them become public so as to cause you harm or injury."

Again Spinoza answered promptly, though this time at less length. But when, two or three weeks later, he



accesit. Verum opera
aminare, ut ratio, quae est inter impulsionem aeris ad
Latera, et inter eam, qua fit Secundum Lineam horizonti
perpendicularem, quoad fieri potest haberetur. quod puto
hoc modo posse fieri. Sit in fig 1. CD speculum
planum probissime Laevigatum.
cui duo marmora A·B imponun= fig·1.
tur. marmor A Ligatum
sit denti F. B vero tangens C
A immediate Ligatum sit filo serico et D
satis robusto H. E est trochlea. G. pondus
quod marmor B a marmore A divellere debet
Secundum Lineam horizonti parallelam
in Secunda fig. E est etiam filum quo marmor A pavimento
alligatur. F est etiam trochlea G pondus, quod B. tangens A
immediate, ab ipso A divellere debet Secundum Lineam ho=
rizonti perpendicularem. Nec opus est hoc fusius explicare

PORTION OF A LETTER

(to Oldenburg, June 1662), reporting certain physical experiments performed by Spinoza.

received the little volume entitled *Certain Physiological Essays* which Oldenburg had promised him, and with it a request for his opinion of it, the philosopher sat down and penned by way of reply a scientific monograph some five thousand words in length. The book was by the famous English scientist, Robert Boyle—he who was described in his Irish epitaph as "the Father of Chemistry and the Uncle of the Earl of Cork"—and it reported a series of chemical and physical experiments, dealing with Nitre and Fluidity. As it turned out, Spinoza did not quite grasp the purpose of those experiments—which is hardly astonishing, seeing that to this day the historians of science are still disagreed as to just what Boyle intended to prove. But what is indeed astonishing is the familiarity which the erstwhile Talmudist reveals with the technique of contemporary experimental science. In his criticism of Boyle's work he reports experiments of his own—for instance, how he liquified nitre in crucibles, collected the smoke in flasks, blew it through long tubes, and then collected the "coagulated icicles." And in the margins of his neatly written epistle he drew diagrams and sketches which reveal unmistakable expertness. If Spinoza preferred mathematical logic to empirical observation as a method of discovering truth, it was certainly not out of ignorance of, or disdain for, the latter. He had evidently begun to follow the scientific achievements of his contemporaries with keen interest and acute understanding. True, he himself did not devote much of his time to actual experimentation, but only because he doubted its ultimate value. He felt that it could reveal only the external and accidental qualities in things, not the essential ones. And, being primarily interested in essentials, in those elements which could reveal the ultimate truth concerning the infinite universe, he believed he could learn more by reasoning synthetically rather than by observing analytically.

Spinoza tried to make this clear in his criticism of Boyle's volume, and it is hardly surprising that the noble chemist did not deem it worth his while to answer in person. Boyle has well been described as "the scientific executor of Bacon's last will and testament," and he evidently had no patience with the strictures of one who had been described to him as an "odd philosopher." He left it to Oldenburg to communicate his refutation, and the slight did not escape the sensitive Jew. The latter's acknowledgment of the answer was unmistakably sardonic.

> "I also give many thanks," he wrote, "to the very learned Mr. Boyle for having deigned to reply to my Notes, in however cursory and preoccupied a manner. For my part, I confess that they are not of such importance that the very learned Mr. Boyle should spend time in answering them which he can devote to higher thoughts. . . ."

This interchange of letters with Oldenburg from August 1661 to July 1662—and no doubt with other correspondents during these months—must have occupied no little of Spinoza's leisure; yet one has reason to believe he did not begrudge the time thus spent. He had evidently become discouraged with his literary work. His attempt to write a comphrehensive essay on the understanding had failed, and the task of amplifying and improving the *Short Treatise*—which was logically the only thing for him to try next—was not alluring. He knew well in what form the revised treatise ought to be written, for he had discovered it while writing the original draft. He saw that the whole work ought to be cast in the strictly geometrical pattern which he had employed in an appendix to the *Short Treatise.* But even though he knew precisely how the work should be done, he found it very difficult to proceed. The reason lay in the apparent impossibility of ever publishing such a work. As he confessed to Oldenburg in April 1662, "I am naturally afraid lest the theologians of our time take offence and, with their characteristic venom, attack me, who utterly loathe quarrels."

One imagines it was this that made the philosopher so ready to receive callers and engage in correspondence during this period. Disheartened by the seeming futility of his literary efforts, it may have been a relief to busy himself with other interests. It would appear that he so encouraged the students from Leyden to visit him, that before long he became a sort of mentor to a group of them. They were among the more inquiring and earnest of the young theologians at the University, and they seem to have fallen into the habit of journeying regularly to the village to converse with

Spinoza about Cartesianism. The academic authorities still frowned on the teaching of the "new philosophy." Indeed at Leyden itself the very mention of Descartes' name had been proscribed only a few years earlier. The proscription, it is true, had since been nullified, and it was no secret that a number even of the professors there were confirmed Cartesians. Nevertheless there was little, if any, public lecturing on the subject.

And that was why certain of the students took to visiting the learned lens-grinder who lived in Rijnsburg. The status of Cartesianism in the Dutch universities at the time was not unlike that of Socialism in the American universities only a few years ago. And the more daring young men at Leyden resorted to the infidel Jew in the near-by village much as radical students at Columbia and New York University used to flock to Upton Sinclair's home on the Palisades across the Hudson.

One can imagine what those sessions in Rijnsburg must have been like. Having scraped the mud from their shoes—it was six miles over rutted lanes from Leyden—the youths would knock on the cottage door, and then enter at the word of bidding. And there would stand their host, a little diffident in his bearing, yet with a welcoming gleam in his large dark eyes. To those tall, blond youths he may have appeared very frail and dark, and strikingly Jewish in his features and posture. If they saw any attractiveness in his wan olive-skinned face, it was an attractiveness definitely foreign to their race. And when he greeted them his accent must have made them all the more aware that he was not one of them. Yet there was a geniality in his countenance which, as Lucas says, held one unconsciously, and this together with the gentle grace of his manner must have quickly dispelled any strangeness they may have felt on first beholding him.

If the visitors came unannounced, they perhaps found the philosopher wearing a threadbare dressing-gown. (As he once explained to an eminent councillor who chanced to find him thus arrayed, a man is never the better for wearing a splendid cloak.) But if he had been expecting them, he would more likely be formally clad. He believed it a man's duty to dress with care when in the presence of others. He was not vain, and he was convinced that only self-love could prompt one to wear costly garb. But, as he took occasion to point out in the *Short Treatise,*

> "when a man sees that his wisdom (wherewith he can be of service to his neighbors) is despised and trampled underfoot simply because he is dressed in shabby clothes, then he does well if, out of the desire to help them, he provides himself with raiment to which they cannot take exception."

Once the formal greetings were exchanged—and the Portuguese Jew, though not given to ceremoniousness, was a man of breeding and had a care for the proprieties—the young men would, no doubt, take their seats in the low-ceilinged room, and the conversation would begin. It would center, of course, around the teachings of

Descartes, the students asking questions, and the lens-grinder patiently answering them. He himself, as we know, had advanced far beyond the Cartesian point of view; yet he was reluctant to inform his callers of that. He believed it was poor strategy, even bad ethics, to shock those who came for enlightenment. It was wiser, he felt, to lead them on step by step until they were ready almost of themselves to receive the unpalliated truth. So with most of his young visitors he confined himself to expounding nothing but pure Cartesianism.

There were some students, of course, with whom he dared to go farther, for they impressed him as mature in mind and capable of understanding his philosophy. To these, says Sebastian Kortholt, he devoted considerable of his time "infecting them free of charge with the evil of his opinions—for he was a bad Atheist gratuitously." In time a small circle of such initiates gathered around Spinoza and several of them remained his followers throughout their lives. There was, for instance, Adrian Koerbagh and his brother Johannes, both of whom were later to suffer persecution for the ideas they imbibed from the lens-grinder. There was also a young man named Pontiaan van Hattem, who was later to found a religion on those ideas. With these, and no doubt others whose names are no longer known, Spinoza seems to have been completely frank, inducting them fully into his pantheistic beliefs.

But, as we have said, with most of the students who came to visit him, he confined himself to elucidating the philosophy of Descartes. He evidently enjoyed giving them instruction, for, as he had already declared in one of his writings, "It is part of my happiness to lend a helping hand, so that others may understand even as I do." And this enthusiasm coupled with his knowledge of the subject made the lens-grinder a signally effective teacher. So apt, indeed, did he prove, that before long one of those students left the University altogether, and came to live with Spinoza. He was a young man named Johannes Casearius, apparently a former pupil of Van den Ende in Amsterdam, and certainly an acquaintance of Spinoza's friends in the city. Perhaps it was at their recommendation that he first came to the philosopher. Why the latter agreed to become his tutor, is not altogether clear. Perhaps he felt that the few florins Casearius could pay for his board and tuition would relieve him of the need to labor at his lenses. Certainly it could not have been out of a desire for the youth's companionship, for Spinoza, though always eager to have friends, was very jealous of his privacy. Besides, Casearius had too unstable a mind to make a good companion for one of Spinoza's staid and cautious intellect. And this, coupled with the constant propinquity enforced by the smallness of the cottage, soon made the presence of the young man a source of sharp annoyance to the teacher. One can tell that from one of his letters. In February 1663, Spinoza's dearest friend in the Amsterdam circle, the learned young merchant named Simon de Vries, wrote to him:

> "Happy indeed, exceedingly happy, is your companion Casearius in that he can live under one roof with you and can converse with you on the best of subjects at breakfast, at dinner, and on your walks."

But Spinoza, his nerves evidently frayed thin by then, could only reply:

> "You have no reason to envy Casearius. Indeed, there is no one whom I find more disagreeable, or with whom I have been more careful to be on my guard. . . . I should like you and all our acquaintances to be warned not to communicate my opinions to him until he shall have attained a riper age. He is too boyish as yet, rather unstable, and more eager for novelty than for truth. . . . Yet—[and the repentant afterthought here lights up Spinoza's character like a lamp]—I hope that he will cure himself of these puerile faults in a few years. Indeed, I am almost sure of it, from what I can judge from his nature; and so his character makes me fond of him."

As it turned out, Casearius did outgrow his youthful failings and developed into a quite worthy man. He became a liberal pastor in India, where he attained fame not alone for his goodly works but also for the researches he made in the flora of the region. (To this day a certain genus of tropical tree is known as the *Casearia.*) But one can well understand how he must have tried Spinoza's patience during those days in Rijnsburg. Before the young man came to live with him, Spinoza had succeeded in making a start on a new book; and he was eager to go on with it. The book was in a sense an elaboration of the *Short Treatise.* When the time came for him to give the work a title, he called it simply the *Ethics;* but *The Principles of Philosophy* would have described it more accurately. For the work dealt not alone with ethics, but also with entology, epistemology, logic, psychology, and all the other philosophic concerns. In that, and in the essential identity of its conclusions, it was related to the *Short Treatise.* But in its sweep it was incalculably grander, and in its form distinctly new. Spinoza was intent on reducing the whole chaos of philosophic speculation to the clarity and order of Euclidean logic. He wanted to build a temple of reason in which each stone stood square and firm on the one beneath it, requiring no mortar of supposition to hold it in place. Therefore he had begun by laying down a series of definitions like giant joists, and across them a series of axioms. And on these he planned to erect a masonry of theorems, proofs, and corollaries as stout and severe and beautifully precise as any structure ever planned by an Attic architect.

By the time Casearius came to live with him, Spinoza had already managed to erect part of the first wall of that temple. He had hewn out and set in place the definitions, axioms, and a number of the propositions establishing the nature and attributes of that which he called God. And his friends in Amsterdam were already in possession of the fragment he had written. Evidently he had been sending them pages of his manuscript as rapidly as he could copy them out, and his friends had formed themselves into a regular study-circle for the specific purpose of discussing his words. We know this from the letter written by De Vries early in 1663 and found not many years ago in the Collegiant Orphanage in Amsterdam. In it he tells the philosopher how the circle conducted its meetings.

> "Each member in turn," he says, "reads through [a portion], explains it according to his own conception, and, moreover, proves everything, following the sequence and order of your propositions. Then, if it happens that we cannot satisfy one another, we think it worth while to make a note of it, and to write to you, so that the matter may possibly be made clearer to us, and that under your leadership we may be able to defend the truth against those who are superstitiously religious, or even Christian, and to stand firm against the onslaught of the whole world."

Spurred on by the interest of these disciples, Spinoza was eager to proceed with the work; but, as we have seen, he found it difficult now that he had young Casearius in his house. The only time he had to himself was after his pupil had gone to bed—in one letter Spinoza actually speaks of the early portion of the *Ethics* as his "night-work"—and even then the consciousness of the other's presence in the next room may have distracted him. The task of thinking out his abstruse ideas, and of fitting them into the geometrical pattern, demanded tremendous concentration. He could not indulge himself in fine frenzies; he had to be patient, deliberate, and exact. His mind had to search the wilderness of unuttered and almost unutterable thought to discover the hidden stones out of which to build his temple. And it was impossible to do that save in solitude.

So finally he had to abandon his work on the *Ethics*. Too distracted day and night to be able to make any progress with it, he found an easier project to occupy his mind. His duties as tutor to Casearius suggested to him the idea of recasting Descartes' arguments in the geometrical mould. The Frenchman had himself recommended the scheme, but had never actually carried it out. So Spinoza undertook the task for him. He saw that he could thus greatly simplify the "new philosophy" for his pupil, and at the same time give himself practice in the use of the geometrical method. Accordingly he began to dictate to Casearius selected portions of Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy* arranged in the form of Euclidean propositions and proofs. He chose at first the portions in which the Frenchman expounded his system of physics, for Spinoza saw no flaw in their logic. But later, when he grew less unsure of his pupil's capacity to understand, he went further and began to deal with Descartes' metaphysics. It was more or less a relaxation for the teacher, an absorbing sport which tided him over until he could return to the work which really mattered. And he seems to have indulged in it throughout the early months of 1663.

But then Spinoza took hold of himself once more. He saw that he was being false to his own beliefs, that he was not fulfilling himself, in devoting so much time to elucidating a philosophy which he no longer accepted. He saw that he must cease procrastinating, and return to the task of expounding his own system of thought. But that necessarily meant two things: first, that he return to his work on the *Ethics,* and second, that he prepare the way for the publication of that book. And both meant that he must leave Rijnsburg. The students from Leyden who kept coming to visit him there, and Casearius who was in his home, were concerned primarily with Descartes; and Spinoza realized he must liberate himself completely from that interest. In his own thought he had advanced far beyond Descartes, and it was necessary for his peace of mind that he say so openly. But, rusticated in the village, it was dangerous for him to do so. If even the Cartesian philosophy was considered blasphemous by the orthodox, how much the more would his own be fulminated against. The pastors were still a very potent power in the land, and Spinoza realized that an obscure lens-grinder—and an outcast Jew to boot—was in no position to flaunt them. He could not count on the support of the liberal professors at Leyden, for among them Cartesianism had become a cult. They already regarded him with hostility because of the reports which had reached them of his criticisms of the "new philosophy." As Lucas explains, these liberal academicians, "being themselves accused of atheism," were all the more eager "to let the storm break on our philosopher." It was imperative, therefore, that Spinoza acquire friends among the freer minded political leaders who were to be found in the land, for without their protection he was helpless. And it was impossible for him to acquire such friends so long as he remained shut away in remote Rijnsburg.

But where should he go? Amsterdam was not to be thought of, for there he was certain to encounter the hostility of the Jews. They had already excommunicated him because of their fear of the ill-repute he might bring them; and if he returned now an avowed freethinker, they might go even further in their efforts to disavow him. Besides, Amsterdam, though the largest city in the land, was not the capital. The seat of the government was in The Hague, and obviously it was there that he must move. He had already visited the place—De Vries mentions the fact in one of his letters—and he must have been acquainted with its attractions. It was a noted center of enlightenment, for a number of the most eminent scientists and scholars in Holland were domiciled there. In addition it contained no Jewish settlement—the first synagogue in The Hague was not founded until early in the next century—for the city had no commercial importance. Finally, it had a relatively healthy climate. Its only drawback was the fact that it was a city, and its crowding and excitement might leave him too little solitude in which to write. But it occurred to him that he could avoid that danger if he settled in one of the suburbs. He had learnt, either on his visit there or through some friend, of a small settlement called Voorburg which was only a half-hour's walk from the capital. He had even heard of a small house which he could rent there, one belonging to a painter named Daniel Tydeman, who was a liberal in his religious ideas. So at last, apparently after much pondering on the matter—for he was not impulsive by nature—he decided to move there. Late in April 1633, after having spent three years in the little cottage in Rijnsburg, Spinoza packed his furniture and other belongings and shipped them off to Voorburg.

He did not settle down there at once, however. Instead he first went to visit his friends in Amsterdam, eager to discuss with them his work and his plans. It was probably a happy interlude for him, for those men had grown very dear to him. Cut off by his own people, that small circle of disciples was in a measure his family. They worried over his wretched health and his wretcheder finances. And—even more endearing—they pored over his manuscripts as though they were revelations from above. Spinoza had no lust for admiration, yet it must have gratified him to see how those men looked up to him. Several of them were many years his senior, and all of them were, if not exactly brilliant, at least intelligent. Yet without exception they regarded him as their master. Not impossibly even Van den Ende, his former teacher, was one of his disciples now, and certainly Clara Maria, the daughter, must have looked upon him with a sort of awe. . . .

Naturally enough, one of the first things Spinoza reported to his friends was the method by which he had inducted Casearius into the Cartesian philosophy. And when he showed them a copy of the geometrical outline he had prepared for his pupil, they were all much impressed. They saw at once the pedagogic value of the scheme, and their one complaint was that the manual covered little more than the second section of Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*. They begged Spinoza to make a similar reconstruction of the first section, and he, eager to gratify their wish, set to work at once.

Within a fortnight he had the task done. And then the disciples began to urge him to let the manual be published. There was need for such a book, they argued, for the interest in the "new philosophy" was greater now than ever. A book which clarified the subject as did this one, was certain to find a market. Besides, the publication of such a book might impress certain of the Cartesians at Leyden who thought it an outrage that a Jew lens-grinder with no academic background should have dared to point out flaws in Descartes' philosophy. It would reveal to them that Spinoza did at least understand that philosophy, and had a right to point out its flaws. And there would be no practical obstacles in the way of its publication, for Jan Rieuwertsz had his own press, and Jarig Jelles, who was quite well-to-do, was ready to defray the cost.

But Spinoza hesitated to agree. In the first place, he had prepared the work with no thought of publication, and he feared his Latin was awkward and uneven. In the second place, the work presented the logic underlying a system of ideas with much of which he himself was not altogether in agreement. He had simply restated what Descartes had written, not what he himself believed. The fact that he had been able to make the restatement in the form of geometrical propositions, did not necessarily establish the validity of what was said. The form was no touchstone of truth; it merely clarified the line of reasoning. And because very few people understood this, Spinoza feared that, if he published the manual, many readers would gather the impression that it expressed his own opinions.

But such objections were easily removed. His friend Dr. Lodewijk Meyer, who was an accomplished Latinist, agreed not alone to revise the manuscript, clothing it "in more elegant style," but also to write a short preface making Spinoza's position clear. And that, of course, ended the author's hesitancy. Leaving the manuscript with Meyer, he bade his disciples farewell—he had already tarried with them several weeks—and took the boat for Voorburg.

CHAPTER IV

THE days of obscurity were ended. Though Spinoza was still no more than thirty when he took up his abode near The Hague, and had as yet published nothing, he had already acquired a peculiar fame. People talked about him, as much because of his strange character as his great learning. Stories were told of the cheerfulness with which he lived in abject poverty, and of the fortitude and serenity with which he faced exile and pain. Such virtues would have been remarkable enough if attributed to a Christian saint; in a free-thinking Jew they sounded quite incredible. And people who heard tell of them became curious to lay eyes on the man. They were eager to see for themselves whether this outcast Israelite was really as virtuous as was reported, and whether he was as erudite and keen-witted too. And once it became known in The Hague that he had come to live in the neighborhood, a steady stream of callers came to his door. "I have scarcely been my own master because of the friends who have deigned to visit me," Spinoza wrote to Oldenburg a few weeks after his arrival in the village.

Such popularity was distracting to the philosopher, but he welcomed it nevertheless. He greatly desired to win friends, for, as we have seen, he felt he needed them in order to be able to publish his opinions. And, with his sudden vogue in the capital, and the impending appearance of his book on Descartes, he was quite hopeful of gaining supporters. As he confessed to Oldenburg:

> "Perhaps now there will be found some who hold the first places in my country who will desire to see the other things which I have written, things which express opinions that are my own; and they may make it their business to see to it that I be allowed to publish them without risk of persecution. If this should happen, then I shall doubtless publish some things at once!"

There was a little delay, however, in the publication of the Cartesian manual. When Spinoza received the proofs of the book, he found certain corrections to make, one of them of a rather illuminating character. Dr. Meyer had taken occasion in his preface to lampoon some "petty creature" (*"homunculus"*) from whom he evidently expected an attack on the book; and Spinoza was insistent that the passage be deleted. As he explained to the intemperate editor:

> "I should like all men to believe that in publishing this little book you are motivated solely by a desire to spread the truth . . . and to induce men in a kindly and friendly way to take up the study of genuine philosophy. . . . This will be easily believed if it is seen that no one is injured, and that nothing is put down which can be even slightly

offensive to anyone. If, however, that creature, or any other, should nevertheless choose to show his malevolence of mind, then you will have some justification for depicting his life and character. But I beg you not to mind waiting till that happens. . . ."

Meyer did not presume to argue the point, nor any of the others raised by his master. The corrected passages were reset—the first edition betrays one of the changes quite obviously—and some months later the *Geometric Version of Descartes' Philosophy*, with the appendix containing the *Metaphysical Cogitations*, made its appearance on the shelves of Rieuwertsz's bookshop.

It was hardly the type of book to arouse a furor, but in certain circles it found an immediate reception. No sooner was it published than Pieter Balling, who belonged to Spinoza's group in Amsterdam, set about preparing a Dutch translation. And when this, too, appeared on the market, Spinoza's name began to be known among the learned all over Holland. "Had he gone no farther," says Pastor Colerus with an almost audible sigh of regret, "he might have preserved to this day the deserved Reputation of a Wise and Learned Philosopher."

But Spinoza was intent on going very much farther. He did not at once rush into print with any of his other writings. His position, he must have felt, was still too insecure for that. Besides, he had nothing on hand that was quite ready for publication. His *Short Treatise on*

God, Man, and his Well-being was no more than a preliminary draft of a book; and the essay *On the Improvement of the Understanding* was still unfinished. So necessity as well as prudence counselled delay. He decided to wait until he had completed the elaborate geometrical exposition of his philosophic system which he had put aside in order to do the manual on Descartes.

It was to this task that he devoted most of his leisure now that he was settled in Voorburg. By day he labored at his craft, grinding and polishing lenses which were sold for him at quite fair prices by his friends in Amsterdam and The Hague. And by night—usually "from the tenth evening hour until the third [in the morning]," says Kortholt—he continued to work on the extraordinary treatise which was later to be known as the *Ethics*. He could not accomplish much at a sitting, for what he had to say was exceedingly abstruse, and he wanted to say it with superlative clarity. He had to go over and over each page, rearranging the propositions, revising the proofs, and rephrasing each separate sentence.

But he did not attempt to hurry the work. He wanted this book to be a definitive document: comprehensive, concise, and irrefutably logical. So he labored at it slowly and painstakingly, laying proposition on proposition with the patient deliberateness of one who builds not for a day but for eternity. And while he was thus engaged, he was content to keep the world in ignorance of his ideas. From time to time he sent portions of the manuscript to his friends in Amsterdam; but to other people he revealed at most only hints of what he was writing. As a consequence he was left unmolested in the village where he now dwelt. He was on the most cordial terms with certain of his neighbors, especially with those who, like his landlord, were inclined to liberalism in theology. Indeed, he is said to have become a sort of counsellor to them, supplying them with texts and telling arguments in their occasional squabbles with the stricter Calvinists in the local church. Despite the rumors that went about concerning this foreign-looking lens-grinder, these less bigoted villagers were obviously fond of him. He was a very moral young man, and he was always kindly and polite. And, no matter what his beliefs, he seemed to know the Scriptures better than their pastor —better even than the elders of the Synod at Delft! So they bared their heads when they passed him on the street, and they listened with respect if he stopped to talk with them.

Of course, for companionship with his intellectual equals Spinoza had to go to The Hague. And when the weather was pleasant and his health permitted it, he frequently put on his company coat and silver-buckled shoes and wandered over there. Sometimes he even spent the night in the city, lodging usually in the house of Mesach Tydman, evidently a kinsman of his landlord. The distance to the city was only about two miles, yet Spinoza may not always have been equal to the effort of trudging there and back in one evening. Besides, often he may have sat so late in conversation with his friends that he thought it safer to wait until morning to go home.

Certain of these friends were men of true distinction. There was, for instance, the famous theologian and humanist, Isaak Vossius, a son of the even more famous Gerhard Johann Vossius. Like his father, he was a most enlightened scholar, being one of the first to dare treat theological dogmas and heathen religions from the historical point of view. He had been a friend of Rabbi Manasseh ben Israel—who had since died—and had often consulted him on matters involving a knowledge of Hebrew. Indeed, so cordial had been their relations that Manasseh had dedicated one of his books to Vossius, and he in turn, being attached at the time to the court of Sweden, had found occasion to speak favorably of the rabbi to Queen Christina. And now that the theologian was living in The Hague, he seems to have cultivated a like friendship with Spinoza. Perhaps he made use of the free-thinking philosopher much as he had once made use of the pious rabbi—to aid him in his Hebrew researches. And Spinoza for his part may have been glad to serve Vossius, if only because it brought him in contact with a man of rare wit and erudition.

Another of Spinoza's acquaintances during this period, and one even more distinguished, was the scientist, Christian Huygens. The bond in this case was a common interest in lens-grinding—Huygens was one of the world's foremost workers in that craft—and Spinoza and he appear to have met with some frequency. It cannot be said that there was ever a close friendship between them. Huygens, though still in his thirties, already enjoyed international renown as a man of science; and this together with the distinction of his birth—he was a son of Sir Constantijn Huygens, the *grand seigneur* of Dutch culture—seems to have contributed a certain arrogance to his manner. In addition, his obsessive dread that his inventions might be stolen from him inclined him to mistrust all with whom he came in contact. As it happens, the fear was well founded, for such thefts were indeed attempted—he himself was not altogether guiltless in that regard—and one of them, involving the pendulum clock which Huygens had invented, cost him a long and exasperating lawsuit. But though his secretiveness was excusable, it must have been nonetheless unpleasant, especially to one as sensitive as was Spinoza. The latter was not particularly interested in Huygens' technological experiments. Oldenburg, faithful to his duties as secretary of the Royal Society of London, kept begging him to relay information concerning those experiments. In one of his letters we find him writing to Spinoza: "I pray you, do not refuse to let me know anything you may have learnt about the success of Huygens in the polishing of telescopic glasses." And in another he says: "I pray you, if you receive any further news of the studies and doings of Mr. Huygens . . . not to mind letting me know as soon as possible." But the philosopher either had no information to convey, or else felt it was not his business to convey it. Only once do we find him referring in any detail to Huygens' doings, and even then it is with no great warmth. In a letter dated November 20, 1665, he writes to Oldenburg:

> "The said Huygens was, and is still, fully occupied in polishing dioptrical glasses. For this purpose he has constructed a machine in which he can turn tools, and it is indeed sufficiently neat. But I do not yet know what advance he has made thereby, nor, to tell you the truth, do I greatly desire to know. For experience has taught me sufficiently that in spherical tools it is safer and better for glasses to be polished with a free hand rather than by any machine. . . ."

The thought of thoughts and labor of labors with Spinoza was philosophy, not science. He might grind lenses for a living, and devote an occasional hour of his leisure to experimenting with chemicals or light-rays; but primarily he was interested in metaphysics and ethics. And in those disciplines there was little he could learn from Huygens. If he continued to visit the lordly scientist, it may have been largely because through him he was able to meet other men of prominence. It was no little advantage to a free-thinker of Spinoza's origins to have entrance to Huygens' home, for it was frequented by the most distinguished citizens in the land. To most of these he may have appeared no more than an oddity; but on some he was able to make a very amiable impression. Certain statesmen with scholarly inclinations became attracted to the strange young philosopher, and took to corresponding with him, or to visiting him when their affairs brought them to The Hague.

There was, for instance, the former Burgomaster of Amsterdam, Koenraad van Beuningen, who ultimately became an avowed devotee of Spinoza's philosophy. Van Beuningen, as it happens, was a somewhat peculiar character, recklessly liberal not alone in his thought but —and this seems to have been the worse crime in thrifty Holland—in his philanthropies as well. Among other of his eccentricities, he had a marked fondness for Jews, and at least one anecdote has come down to us of his sympathy with their cause. Once when he was serving as diplomatic envoy at Versailles, Louis XIV tried to twit him because Holland persisted in tolerating the accursed race. And Van Beuningen is said to have replied: "If God has not destroyed them in all these centuries, then He must want them to survive; and, since all other countries expel them, are not the Dutch merely doing God's will in giving them shelter?" . . . Perhaps it was this sympathy with the Jews that first attracted the statesman to Spinoza. But later, when he discovered the character of the latter's opinions, the attraction seems to have ripened into an intense devotion. Unhappily, his espousal of Spinoza's philosophy profited neither of them in the end. Relatives covetous of Van Beuningen's wealth succeeded in having him declared mentally incompetent. And in his last years, when the poor man did actually go insane, popular prejudice fastened the blame for it entirely on Spinoza's influence.

But Van Beuningen was an exception. Most of the other personages who became interested in the free-thinking philosopher were men of less dubious stability of mind. There was, for instance, Johann Hudde, a member of the States of Holland and for many years Mayor of Amsterdam. He was no warm-hearted, muddle-headed enthusiast, but a critical thinker with a fair grounding in science. There was also Conraad Burgh, the Treasurer-General of the United Netherlands, Hugo Boxel, the Pensionary of Gorkum, and Abraham Cuffeler, a distinguished young lawyer. Most important of all, there was the Grand Pensionary himself, the great Jan de Witt. Not all of these great personages were equal to following Spinoza's rationalism—Hugo Boxel, for instance, wrote him several letters in an effort to prove that ghosts were real!—yet they evidently all recognized the power of his intellect and the nobility of his character. And thus it came about that in a quiet, unspectacular way the free-thinking Jew became a notable character in the Dutch capital. The aristocratic French exile, Charles de St. Denis, Seigneur de St. Evremont, who visited The Hague at about this time, discovered to his astonishment that it was veritably the fashion there to be acquainted with Spinoza. "His knowledge, his modesty, and his unselfishness," he reports, "made all the intellectuals there esteem him and seek his company."

Such popularity was indeed astonishing, for the philosopher had nothing but his virtues to recommend him. His birth was not merely humble: to most good Christians it was positively shameful. Even the most enlightened must have been conscious of his ghetto origin, and, like Huygens, probably spoke of him—among themselves—as "the Israelite of Voorburg," or "our Jew." In addition, he was extremely poor. His clothes had obviously seen better days. The quarters where he received his visitors, though tidy, were pathetically bare. Yet these detractions—and they were by no means slight in that flamboyant age—counted for nothing in his case. He was honored and sought after despite them, so compelling was his mind and so admirable his character.

And Spinoza was evidently pleased that he enjoyed such esteem, for it not alone assured protection for his eventual publications, but it also aroused interest in his ideas. Despite his innate reserve, he craved to lead his fellowmen to the light which suffused his own mind. It was, as he had written, part of his happiness "to lend a helping hand so that others may understand even as I do, and so that their understanding and desire may entirely agree with my own." And for that reason he was eager to converse and correspond not alone with enlightened men in high station, but with all who showed an interest in the pursuit of philosophic truth. So eager was he, indeed, that on more than one occasion he wasted time and ink on men quite incapable of understanding his ideas. The most glaring instance of this is his long correspondence with a dilettante grain-broker of Dordrecht named Willem van Blyenbergh. The man first wrote to Spinoza late in 1664, saying that he had read the *Geometrical Version of Descartes' Principles* "pretty frequently and attentively," and desired further enlightenment on certain points in it. The man described himself—and his prolixity should have warned Spinoza—as one who,

> "impelled by the sheer desire for pure truth, endeavors in this brief and transitory life, as far as human intelligence permits, to set his feet firmly in knowledge; and who, in his search for truth, sets himself no other object than truth itself; one who seeks to obtain for himself through science neither honors nor riches, but truth alone, and peace of mind as a result of truth; and one who, among all truths and sciences, does not find more pleasure in any of them than in Metaphysics, at least in certain parts of it, if not in all of it, and finds his whole joy of life in devoting thereto the hours of leisure which he has to spare."

An uncharitable mind might have been moved to wonder how so verbose a writer could have any leisure at all for metaphysics; but Spinoza was anything but uncharitable. He sat down at once to reply, inditing an "epistolary dissertation" well over two thousand words in extent. He did not know that his correspondent had already answered his own questions in a short book which he had published under the far from short title: *Theology and Religion defended against the views of Atheists, wherein it is shown by natural and clear arguments that God has implanted and revealed a Religion, that God wants to be worshipped in accordance with it, and that the Christian Religion not only agrees with the Religion revealed by God but also with the Reason which* *is implanted in us*. Spinoza took the grain-merchant's account of himself at its face value, and replied that he valued nothing more than the honor of entering into the bonds of friendship with people who sincerely love truth. "I believe," said he, "there is nothing in the world which we can love with tranquillity except such men, for it is impossible to dissolve such love . . . since it is founded on the love which each has for the knowledge of truth." . . .

But he was very soon to discover that the love of truth cherished by his correspondent was quite unlike his own. Within a week he received a second epistle, this one more than seven thousand words in length, in which the grain-merchant frankly confessed that he deemed the Word of God a safer guide than rational investigation! That was, of course, a blow to Spinoza, and he saw at once that nothing could be gained from further correspondence with such a man. Yet he was too polite to end it without at least giving the pious merchant his reason. So he wrote him frankly:

> "I hardly believe that our correspondence can be for our mutual instruction. So far as I am concerned, although I have spent some years in the study of Holy Scripture, still I frankly and unambiguously confess that I do not understand it. . . . [therefore] I accept completely that which is established by my reason, never searching Holy Scripture to see if it is contradicted therein" . . . .

But Spinoza could not bring himself to close with that. Having been requested in that second letter to answer a number of further questions, he felt it his duty to comply. And before he was done he had composed a missive almost four thousand words in length!

That led to a third letter from the Dordrecht illuminatus, and to this also Spinoza made reply. He tried to say again, and this time rather more flatly, that there was no sense in their continuing to write to each other. But the merchant, still undeterred, actually found occasion then to journey to Voorburg to call on Spinoza in person. Evidently he was received most courteously, for no sooner did he return to his home than he began once more to write his interminable letters. And only then was the free-thinker's patience at last exhausted. He let some weeks pass, and then wrote a courteous note asking, "in the friendliest way," that the other desist from writing again. And thus at last did the futile correspondence come to an end.

One ought to add that the pious burgher did not fail to repay the philosopher for his patience. In 1674 he brought forth a vituperative refutation of Spinoza's *Treatise on Theology and Politics,* and eight years later a violent polemic against the *Ethics.* It was the sort of gratitude not necessarily unbecoming one who proclaimed himself a "Christian Philosopher." . . .

"His misfortune came of his being too good," declared Lucas of his beloved master; and when one sees how the latter squandered his energies on dullards like the Dordrecht grain-broker, one is inclined to agree with the chronicler. For Spinoza was no titan brimming over with energy, and he had need to husband his strength. What with his heredity, and the ravages wrought by his long hours at the work-bench and longer hours spent over books, his constitution by now was wrecked. He was literally wasting away—and he was well aware of it, too. He never complained—at least, never in the letters that have come down to us, or in the reports of those who knew him. In that respect he lived his philosophy, bearing his afflictions without a murmur. But though he said nothing to others, he did not deny to himself that he was in pain. Nor did he cease to seek a means of curing his malady. Lucas avers he became so interested in medicine that "nobody ever had a better understanding of that branch of knowledge." Perhaps so; but a better understanding of medicine than was possessed by other men in that day was still far from adequate. Spinoza thought that strict diet would prove beneficial, and he ate so abstemiously that one wonders how he ever survived even to the age of forty-four. (The fashion now in the treatment of tuberculosis is to gorge the patient with food.) Furthermore, he knew no better than to resort to the familiar remedies of the time, including even bleeding. We learn this from one of his letters to a friend and physician named Johan Bouwmeester.* In it the philosopher writes:

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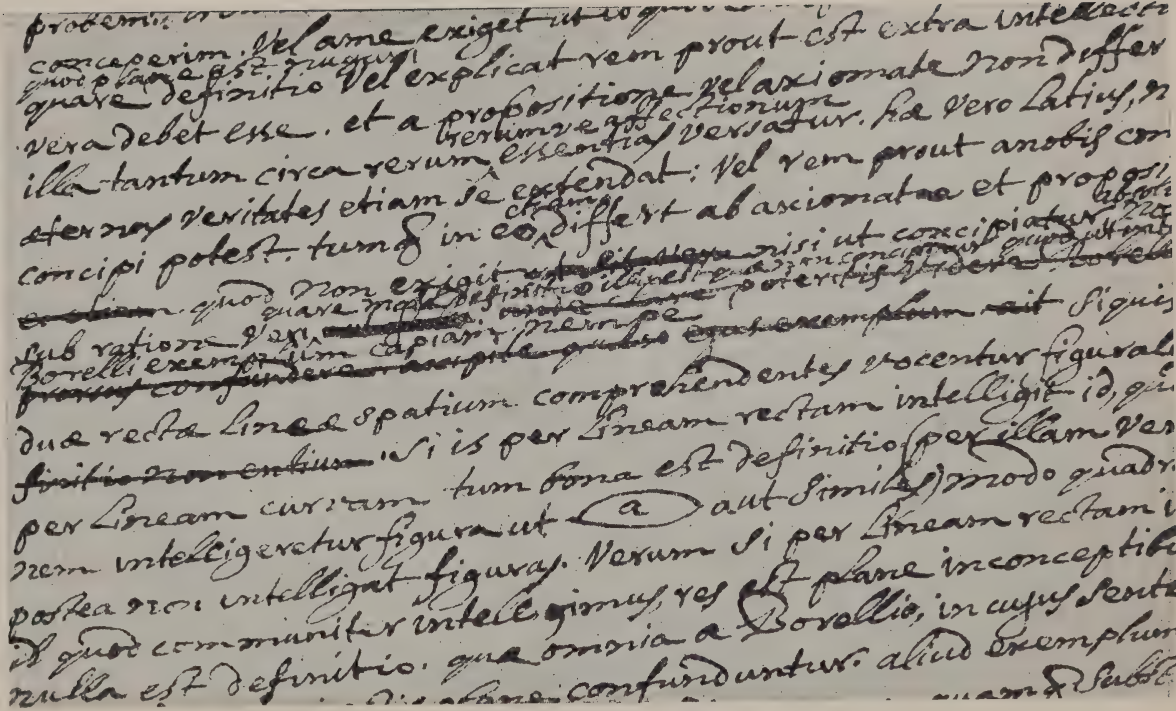
* This letter, dated June 1665, was discovered only some seventy-five years ago. It was omitted from the collection made by Spinoza's posthumous editors because, as an annotation on the back declares, they decided it was "of no value"!

> "I await some of that conserve of red roses which you promised, although I have for a long time now been better. . . . I opened a vein [about a fortnight earlier] but the fever did not cease. . . . But I have twice or three times been afflicted with tertian ague, which, however, I have driven off at last with a good diet, and sent to the devil. I know not where it went, but I am taking care that it should not return."

This is almost the only specific reference to his ill-health in all of Spinoza's correspondence, and it is for that reason worthy of attention. The conserve of roses of which he speaks was the common medicine in those days for bronchial and lung troubles. It was a compound of one part of rose-buds to two parts of sugar boiled in a little water, and while it could have done the patient no earthly good, it had at least the merit of not doing harm either. And, of course, the dieting may have been an excellent therapy for the malaria which he mentions. But the blood-letting was a far graver matter, for it drained him of strength which he desperately needed. No wonder, therefore, that Colerus could write of him that he was "a man of a very weak Constitution, unhealthy and lean." Born of a phthisic mother, reared in marshy Vloijenburg, bent over books almost all his life, breathing glass dust by day, staying up half the night, and to boot suffering malaria, undernourishment, and the most barbarous therapies—the wonder of it is that he had any constitution at all! . . .

And that is why his considerateness toward corre-



PORTION OF A LETTER

written to De Vries, February 1663, showing the care with which Spinoza revised and corrected his composition.

spondents like the Dordrecht grain-broker was so lamentable. Phthisis when virulent is a cruelly enervating disease, for the whole body struggles feverishly to fight it off. Those who are afflicted with it often feel weak even when they arise in the morning, and before evening they are usually left exhausted. So Spinoza, who worked hard at his craft all day long, must have had to whip himself to be able to go on working after nightfall.

Had he been willing, he might have been relieved of the necessity of grinding lenses for a living, for there were those among his friends who were right eager to provide for his needs. But he would not accept their aid. We are told that on one occasion Simon de Vries, who was a man of some means, tried to persuade the philosopher to accept a gift of two thousand florins—"to enable him to live a more easie Life." But Spinoza politely refused, pleading as his excuse that "if he received so much Money, it would infallibly divert him from his Studies and Occupations." Perhaps that was no more than an excuse; his real reason may have been that he was jealous of his independence. He did not want to be beholden to anyone, not even to his dearest disciple. Independence was so much a fetish with this homeless Jew that he was reluctant to accept even common hospitality from others. "Though he was often invited to eat with his Friends," says Colerus, "he chose rather to live upon what he had at home, though it were never so little, than to sit down at a good table at the expence of another Man." And this choice was not dictated by whim. Spinoza knew that he could never be happy unless he was free, and that he could never be free so long as he lived off the bounty of others.

So he continued to grind his lenses.

CHAPTER V

HE ground his lenses all day long, and when night came he returned to his writing. Spinoza was still at work on the *Ethics,* still hard at work on that majestic temple of reason which was to be his house of prayer for all mankind. Writing letters to people took up some of his leisure, and so did his quiet social life; but neither these distractions nor any others were permitted to halt his labor on this book. At the time he came to Voorburg he had as yet written only a portion of the first division of the work; but two years later he was already well along in what eventually became Part Four. Some seventy thousand words he had written by that time—which is testimony enough to the diligence with which he applied himself. For those seventy thousand words had not come easily. Rather they had been wrung out by relentless travail of the mind. One has but to glance at a page of the *Ethics* to realize this. Spinoza had not poured forth paragraphs in a storm of lyric frenzy; he had literally hewn them out of the solid bedrock of reason. And he had laid them with hair-breadth precision, each in its essential place, so that they all stood square, true, unshakable. Classic he had made his temple, not Baroque as was the fashion in his day. It was like his way of living—inexorably honest, unrelentingly austere.

Until 1665 he continued to labor away at the *Ethics*, completing by that time more than two-thirds of the entire treatise. And then suddenly he put it aside! Precisely what prompted the decision is a matter of conjecture. Perhaps something that happened in Voorburg early in 1665 had a little to do with it. The task of choosing a new pastor for the local church had divided the whole village into two warring camps. The liberals, headed by Spinoza's landlord, Daniel Tydeman, had favored a certain Zeeland clergyman whom they knew to be a man of enlightened ideas; and they had sent a petition to that effect to the Magistrate of Delft, who was responsible for the clerical appointments in the district. But at once the orthodox had countered with another petition in which their most telling argument, apparently, was the charge that the liberals were under the influence of "a certain Spinoza, a Jew by birth, an atheist, a scoffer at religion, and a tool for evil in the republic, as numerous scholars and preachers can attest!"

The philosopher must have been mortified when he learnt of that calumny. There was no charge he resented more than that of being an atheist, for he—the "God-intoxicated Spinoza" as Novalis truly called him—considered an atheist a man without understanding. Besides, he loathed dissensions, and all his life he had struggled to steer clear of them. And to discover himself now the center of a nasty squabble—and through no overt act of his own—made him heart-sick. Even had the slanderous attack on him been disregarded by the authorities, he would still have felt wounded. As it turned out, however, the charges of the orthodox party were honored at Delft. No action was taken against Spinoza himself; but the candidate favored by his friends was rejected, and a strict Calvinist was appointed pastor of Voorburg!

It was no more than a passing incident, yet it seems to have shocked Spinoza to an awareness of what was going on in the world. There he had been working away at his temple of reason while all about him raged a flood of bigotry. He had been patiently struggling to expound a system of sublime rationality for a race still steeped in superstition. He saw that he must bestir himself. Abstract metaphysical problems would have to wait; there were concrete social ones to be settled first.

It became clear to Spinoza—now that his eyes were open—that a very evil change was coming over his land. The flame of tolerance which had made Holland a light unto the nations had begun to wane. Reaction was setting in everywhere—in the universities, the churches, and above all the councils of state. The power of Jan de Witt, who had been supreme in Holland during twelve prosperous years, seemed to be dwindling at last

—and with it the power of the Dutch liberals. And Spinoza saw that something must be done before it was too late. He knew Jan de Witt and admired him intensely. For one thing the Grand Pensionary was a man of learning. Already as a youth he had distinguished himself as a writer on mathematics, and throughout his years in office he had continued to interest himself in scientific pursuits. Indeed, it was Huygens' opinion that had it not been for De Witt's preoccupation with statecraft, he might have become the foremost mathematician of the age. That in itself would have been enough to win Spinoza's admiration; but in addition the Grand Pensionary impressed him as a man of singular honesty, patriotism, and high-minded political genius.

Jan de Witt had come into power in 1653, when Holland was on the verge of ruin; and by sheer wilfulness and intelligence he had not merely staved off disaster, but had actually led his country to new glory. The populace, however, had never been altogether with him. He was an impassioned republican, and the masses, servile in soul and therefore lovers of monarchy, resented his audacious rule. They yearned for the return of the hereditary Stadholderate, and wept tears for the royal child of the House of Orange in whose stead De Witt presumed to reign. As long, however, as the Grand Pensionary was able to secure prosperity for the land, his position was secure. The landed aristocrats, and the clergy of the established church, agitated against him day in and day out. They spread rumors that De Witt was an infidel and a traitor; they fomented dissent in the town-councils, started intrigues in the States-General, and plagued him in other ways. But De Witt was a man of endless resourcefulness—quick-witted, persuasive, and daring. And what with the burgher class and the intellectuals loyalling supporting him, he carried through his far-sighted policies despite all opposition.

But in 1664, when the Dutch possessions in North America were captured by the British, and a second costly war broke out with that rival power, De Witt's hold began to weaken. And after the disastrous defeat of the Dutch navy the following summer, it looked as though his rule was at an end. Hysteria swept the country, and the cry went up for a return of the Orange régime. The aristocrats were, of course, the chief agitators, but the loudest were the pastors. De Witt had been steadily crowding the clergy out of politics throughout his years in office, and now they saw their chance to avenge themselves. They began to arouse the masses against him, saying that God's wrath was being visited on their land because of its impious ruler. They pointed out what manner of men were the Pensionary's boon companions: scientists who dared to inquire into God's mysteries, libertines, renegade Jesuits, rank atheists. And they swore that the Doom would befall the entire nation unless that arch-blasphemer was hounded from office.

And it was at this juncture that Spinoza sprang into the lists. He was not the only one of the intellectuals to perceive the gravity of the situation. Judging from the flood of libertarian pamphlets which now began to pour from the presses, the entire free-thinking confraternity had become aroused. Ostensibly Jan de Witt had no part in this counter-agitation; yet secretly he must have inspired and even subvented it. It is said that he actually gave pensions to certain of the pamphleteers, and there can be no doubt that he did protect them. Even Spinoza is said to have received a stipend of two hundred florins a year from the Pensionary, and though there is no evidence of this in the account-books of either of them, the report is not absolutely incredible. For such a stipend would not have been a bribe. The philosopher would have been eager to write in defense of De Witt's policies even though it brought him persecution rather than favor. And, as we shall see, his writings for the liberal cause did bring him persecution.

One must realize there was fire in Spinoza's soul. (Was he not a child of the ghetto?) True, it had always burnt low—always at least since his break with the synagogue—but that was only because he had deliberately banked it. His discretion was a conscious achievement; his caution was intentional and studied. The curious man had worked it all out philosophically. As he had already declared in the Fourth Part of the *Ethics:* "the virtue of a free man [by which he meant a man guided by reason] appears equally great in refusing to encounter dangers as in overcoming them."

That was one of the propositions in his geometry of human conduct, and his proof of it lay in the truth that "an equally great virtue or strength of mind is required to restrain daring as to restrain fear." And his own behavior had been dictated by this purely intellectual conviction. No doubt his rearing in a community of former Maranos had made it not too difficult for him to follow out the conviction, for caution had been a very necessary recourse in the life of his harried ancestors. But even so it had only been with effort that he had lived so circumspectly all these years.

We can tell this from an unconscious revelation which he made in one of his moments of relaxation. It had long been his habit to amuse himself by drawing portraits, sometimes of his friends, and sometimes of historical characters. He had distinct talent as a draftsman—it is manifest in the neat sketches of scientific apparatus which he made in the margins of many of his letters—and in Holland, where drawing was virtually the national pastime in the seventeenth century, it was natural for him to cultivate the art. Colerus reports that he saw a whole folder of Spinoza's sketches, and they proved that the philosopher "could draw a Head very well in Ink or with Coal." These sketches have not come down to us, but fortunately one of them is described by the pastor, and what he has to say of it is arresting. It was a sketch of "a Fisherman having only his Shirt on, with a Net on his Right Shoulder." Colerus had no difficulty in recognizing the figure as that of

Masaniello, the Neapolitan rebel, who was one of the famous characters in that generation.

Masaniello was a fisherman who had led a dramatic insurrection in 1647 against the Spaniards who were then oppressing his countrymen. Incensed at the attempt to levy a new tax on fruit, which was almost all that the poor had to eat, he had put himself at the head of a mob which stormed the city gates, burnt the customs office, and drove the hated viceroy from the palace. Having thus taken possession of Naples, Masaniello became its ruler. He was evidently a most extraordinary young man—he was only twenty-five—for although acclaimed "captain general" of the mob, and placed in supreme command, he continued to wear his fisherman's garb and live in his own hut. And when a few days later the ousted authorities promised to remove the more oppressive taxes, and make other amends, Masaniello was quite content to surrender. His title of "captain general of the Neapolitan people" was confirmed by the returned viceroy; and he was given a gold chain of office and offered a handsome pension. But the young fisherman would not be bribed. Refusing the pension and laying down all the dignities, he asked only to be allowed to return to his old life! But then something happened which has never been satisfactorily explained. Evidently the excitement of the past days took a belated toll of Masaniello's reason; or else he was poisoned the night he banqueted with the viceroy. Whatever the cause, he suddenly became a frenzied maniac, and his own followers, content with their gains, turned against him. The very mob which he had led to victory only nine days earlier, befell him now as he stood haranguing in the market-place. They murdered him, threw his body into a ditch outside the city walls, and delivered his head to the viceroy. Whereupon the tyrant, knowing himself secure again in his position, immediately restored the oppressive taxes which had given rise to the rebellion. The populace, mad with remorse for what they had done to their leader, dug up his mutilated corpse and gave it a magnificent funeral. But they could do no more than that. No new leader arose to take Masaniello's place, and thenceforth the people had to endure the oppression in silence. . . .

The tragic story of that young Neapolitan rebel became known throughout Europe, and his portrait, always in a fisherman's cloak with a net over his shoulder, became the stock symbol of revolt. The fact that Spinoza should have tried his hand at the subject is itself significant. But what is far more revealing is that when it came to sketching the rebel's features, the amateur artist used his own face as the model! Colerus is quite definite on the point. "Mr. Van der Spyck," he writes, "at whose House *Spinosa* lodged when he died, has assured me that the Draught of that Fisherman did perfectly resemble *Spinosa,* and that he had certainly drawn himself." The inference is obvious: the philosopher had identified himself with that rebel! His sketch was an unconscious confession that had he given vent to his inward compulsion, he, too, might have tried to lead a mass uprising. His reason restrained him from it; but the compulsion remained. So he was driven to venting it in artistic fantasy.

But there was a point beyond which such evasion could no longer be sustained. As the months went by, and the hysteria of reaction mounted, Spinoza saw that he dared stand aside no longer. Bigotry was closing over the land like a giant fist reaching out of the night; and he realized that the time was come when even he must challenge the menace. He could not take to pamphleteering, of course, for he had neither the talent nor the temper for philippics. But he was fitted for a service which, if less spectacular, might in the end prove far more effective. Instead of joining in the thunder of polemics, he could raise the still, small voice of doubt. Instead of hurling himself upon the bigots, he could try to sap the ground from beneath them. He could take the Bible, which was the source of most of the bigotry, and reveal its irrelevance to life in an enlightened commonwealth.

And thus it came about that the philosopher took to writing his *Treatise on Theology and Politics*. Oldenburg was greatly puzzled when he heard of the departure. "I see that you are not so much philosophizing as, if I may so put it, theologizing," he wrote in September 1665. "Please tell me your plan and object in this work of yours."

Spinoza complied at once. His intention, he explained, was to write a treatise on the interpretation of the Scriptures, and he saw three reasons for the undertaking:

> "First, I realize that the prejudices of the theologians are among the chief obstacles preventing men from directing their minds to philosophy, and I must therefore do all I can to expose them. . . . Second, the common people do not cease to accuse me falsely of atheism, and I am obliged to disprove this as much as I can. Third, the freedom of philosophizing and of saying what we think is being steadily suppressed here through the excessive authority and impudence of the preachers; and I want to vindicate these principles in every possible way." . . .

The next four years were devoted to that undertaking. It took Spinoza all that while to accomplish it, because he discovered that to be adequate his treatise had to be far more than a mere analysis of the Scriptural text. Indeed, when the book was completed, that analysis occupied no more than one of its twenty chapters. Historically it is perhaps the most important of the chapters, and, because of the research it entailed, it must have been the most difficult to write. But it was still no more than a single chapter, and in a work of well over a hundred thousand words it did not bulk very large. The scope of the book apparently widened in writing, becoming at last a searching discussion of the whole problem of freedom of thought in the sovereign state.

What most impresses the present-day reader of the *Treatise on Theology and Politics*, is the obviousness of most of its contentions. The work seems almost platitudinous, so completely have its teachings become part of our intellectual heritage. But to gauge its worth rightly we must transport ourselves back to the seventeenth century, when a man was called a Libertine if he did not believe in infant baptism, and when witches were still being burnt at the stake. In that age Spinoza's book was like a live coal out of hell, and men howled with terror, so shocked were they by its daring. Yet all the book said was that the Bible *as commonly interpreted* caused only mischief, error, and strife.

It was not against the Bible that Spinoza inveighed, but solely against the terrible importance which most people attached to it. For, as he saw it, the fact that the Bible was said to be an ancient revelation did not prove it had relevance today. True, it did teach certain moral ideals which were permanent in their value and universal in their application. But the very people who made most to-do over the Bible, seemed to pay least heed to those ideals. What they emphasized were the inconsequential details—the incredible miracles, the childish allegories, and the elaborate ceremonial laws. They took the Bible literally, accepting it word for word from cover to cover. And therein lay their fundamental mistake. They did not seek to *understand* the Holy Writ; they were content simply to *believe* it.

There was but one way to understand the Bible, said Spinoza, and that was to "examine it in a spirit of entire freedom and without prejudice." And this he set out to do in his book. He showed first of all that the Holy Writ consists of two elements, the one universal and permanent, and the other local and transient. The universal element is contained in its moral teachings—the "dogmas of the Universal Faith," as he called them. These were, in essence, "to love and obey God with the whole heart and mind, and to practice justice and charity toward our neighbor." But, argued the free-thinker, because these teachings had to be impressed on unenlightened men, those who delivered them, the prophets, were compelled to employ vivid images and awe-inspiring allegories. Indeed, those very prophets were themselves unenlightened men, for they understood God with their imaginations rather than their intellects. They were zealots guided by moral intuition, not philosophers thinking rationally. Therefore they were capable of exercising such influence over the ignorant masses. They spoke of God in terms that unreasoning folk could comprehend, describing him as an old white-haired man wearing a white garment, or as a mighty king seated on a throne, or as a fire or a dove. And they made their tales seem miraculous, "for the masses believe that the power of God is most clearly displayed by events which are extraordinary and seem contrary to nature—especially if such events bring them any profit or convenience." Actually, of course, such a belief is in very essence blasphemous, for it implies that "God has created nature so weak, and has ordained for her laws so barren, that he is repeatedly compelled to come afresh to her aid if he wishes that things should happen as he desires." Obviously, there cannot be any such supernatural happenings, and if the Bible tells of them, it is simply because those who wrote the Bible saw things happen which they in their ignorance could not explain naturally.

And thus alone can one rationally account for all the "wonders" to be found in the Bible—for all the strange prophecies and apocalyptic visions and the fantastic chronicles. They were employed by ancient Orientals to convince other ancient Orientals that God must be obeyed. It is absurd, said Spinoza, for us to take them literally, for these are modern times and we are Occidentals, and the Scriptural imagery has lost its meaning for us. Besides, to take the Bible literally is to imply that it is verbally inspired and true. And such an implication becomes patently preposterous once one examines the Bible text with care. For there are obvious discrepancies in it which cannot possibly be reconciled intelligently. The medieval commentator, Ibn Ezra, saw this clearly, but he dared indicate it only by "dark hints." But, Spinoza promised, "I shall not scruple to elucidate them, and thus throw full light on the subject."

And he did. He proceeded to examine the entire Old Testament, especially the Five Books of Moses, listing all the palpable inconsistencies which Ibn Ezra hinted at, and a number more which he himself detected. Other free-thinking writers, for instance Jean Morin in 1633, and John Hobbes in 1651, had already attempted such examinations. But theirs were intemperate and relatively superficial efforts. It waited for this Jew who had been schooled in a rabbinical academy to put forth the first really exhaustive, serious, and impressive critical study of the Scriptures. To this day the science of Old Testament Criticism, despite that it has engaged the labors of myriads of erudite scholars in all the lands of the world, has not advanced far beyond the position to which Spinoza raised it. For with his enormous erudition and his incalculable keenness of mind he discovered almost as much, at least of the fundamental facts, as there was to be discovered in the field. And his conclusion—one which all enlightened students of the Bible accept today—was that the Pentateuch contains not so much a true history of what actually occurred, as fragmentary materials out of which such a history might be made. As he put it quite bluntly:

> "Anyone who but observes how in these Five Books of Moses precept and narrative are jumbled together without order, and how one and the same story is often met with again and again, and occasionally with gross differences in the details—anyone who observes these things will certainly come to the conclusion that in the Pentateuch we have merely notes and collations. . . ."

But such imperfections in the texts were, he insisted, of secondary importance. What most invalidated the Bible as a unique means of salvation was the fact that its letter—though not its spirit—was intended for a particular people at a particular time. Its aim, the teaching of right living, was even today tremendously important;

but its means, the enactment of certain statutes and ordinances, had long since lost all relevance. Granted that the laws of Hebrew polity commanded in the Bible were indeed "revealed," they were "revealed" solely to and for the Jews. It may have been necessary in the ancient Jewish commonwealth for the people to believe that their government derived its authority directly from the will of God as expressed in the Scriptures. But such a belief is not incumbent on the citizens of any other state, least of all of a modern and enlightened one. And if that is so, then the ministers of religion no longer have the right to meddle in the affairs of government, nor have the governors the right to dictate concerning religion. Church and state must be kept severely apart, and the citizens must be granted liberty to believe what they please, and say what they believe.

> "Freedom of opinion belongs of right to all, and the privilege of determining the articles of faith should be left to each man according to his capacity, no one being judged pious or impious save by his works."

Such freedom is imperative, for

> "the more the rulers seek to curtail it, the more obstinately are they resisted. Not indeed by the greedy, the sycophants, and other numskulls, who think the supreme salvation consists in filling their stomachs and gloating over their money-bags; but by those whom good education, sound morality, and virtue have rendered free."

It is true that the masses, always intolerant of men of enlightenment, are often insistent that such freedom be curtailed; but the rulers must withstand the masses. If they fail, then they only make it necessary for the best citizens, "those who love virtue and the liberal arts," to flee from the land. And "what greater misfortune can be conceived for a state than that honorable men should be sent into exile like criminals because they hold diverse opinions which they cannot disguise?" For such men will not be cowed into submission.

> "He that knows himself to be upright does not fear the fate of a criminal and shrinks from no punishment; his mind is not wrung with remorse as though he had committed a disgraceful deed; he holds that death in a good cause is no punishment, but an honor—that death for freedom is glory!"

It was a Jew who wrote those words—one who had been driven with maledictions from the synagogue, but still a Jew. And that only adds to the anomalousness of the *Treatise on Theology and Politics*. One might expect a son of the ghetto to *think* such things as are to be found in that book—but not to *say* them. Not in the seventeenth century, at least. For at that time the Jews still lived in terror, never daring to raise their voices, content merely to be allowed to live. They were not content in their secret hearts. No, there they groaned for something more. They wanted to be utterly free—to enjoy just that liberty which their outcast brother dared to demand openly, the liberty to believe and say what they pleased. But they were afraid to utter their want. Instead they sought to relieve it in dreams. They told themselves that the Messiah was coming, that in a little moment their Redeemer would be here. For centuries already they had been revelling in that dream, and they were still revelling in it now. Indeed, in those very months when Spinoza sat writing his insurgent treatise, the Jews were going mad with that dream. A demented Kabalist in Turkey named Sabbatai Zevi had just set himself up as the Messiah, and from end to end of the world his brethren were awaiting the moment when he would blow the horn of their Redemption. In the ghetto of Amsterdam, as in every other place where Jews were to be found, they rent themselves with repentance, and danced for joy that their Day was near. The young men with whom Spinoza had attended the yeshivah were among the leaders in the jubilation. They decked themselves out in the broad green silk ribbons which were Sabbatai's raiment, and with timbrels they trooped to the synagogue to read the letters that came from Smyrna. Many sold their houses and cumbersome possessions so as not to be delayed when the signal came for them to depart. They packed huge casks of food—peas, beans, dried meats, and shredded prunes—all in readiness for the long voyage back to the Holy Land. And they prayed and fasted day after day; and they waited . . . waited . . . waited. . . .

Even the Gentiles became infected with the fever. Wondrous portents were seen in all the lands of Europe; comets fell like hail, streams turned in their courses, strange ships with Hebrew letters on their sails were sighted in the dawn-light. And a credulous wonder took hold of the world. Even the enlightened scientists became curious. In December 1665, Oldenburg wrote to Spinoza:

> "There is a rumor in everybody's mouth here that the Jews, who have been dispersed for more than two thousand years [*sic*], are to return to their country. Few in this place believe it, but many wish it. Tell your friend what you hear and think about this matter. . . . If this important announcement be true, it would seem to bring a crisis on the whole world."

We do not know what Spinoza answered, for in the correspondence now extant his next letter to Oldenburg is dated ten years later. All we do know is that during all this hysteria, which continued for many months, he sat quietly in his room in Voorburg and worked away at his book on the Bible. From a remark in one of his writings one gathers that Spinoza regarded the eventual restoration of his people to their homeland as both possible and desirable; but it is inconceivable that he thought such a restoration might be accomplished miraculously. He had no faith in messiahs; he believed in the potency only of reason. And it was to bring a little more reason into the world that he labored so diligently on his treatise. Four long years he worked on it, apparently forgetful of all other concerns. For it was clear to him that this treatise answered an immediate and imperative need.

The intellectual heavens, far from clearing, had grown darker with each day. The rumblings of clerical thunder mounted, and at last lightning actually began to strike. The church synods, conscious of their renewed strength, took to plaguing the more flagrant free-thinkers. They browbeat the magistrates into suppressing "atheistic" pamphlets, and even into arresting and fining their authors. Spinoza was not dismayed by the campaign. Convinced of the truth of his opinions, and sure that the enlightened, for whom alone his book was intended, would be convinced in turn, he worked on unperturbed. He allowed no rancor to creep into his treatise. On the contrary, he sought to make its tone almost conciliatory. He realized that his arguments themselves were sufficiently incisive; he had no desire to add to them the barb of vehement speech. Until almost the very last he was able to control his temper, writing on with painstaking care not to give gratuitous offence.

But at the very end, when he came to write the preface, he could hold himself in no longer. The vicious campaign of the clericals had caused the death of one of his close friends and followers, and the crime stirred him to fury. Adriaan Koerbagh, who had been his disciple ever since the Rijnsburg days, had published a book entitled *A Light Shining in Dark Places to Enlighten the Chief Points of Theology and Divine Worship.* It was an attack on Christian dogmatism, Protestant as well as Catholic, and, save in its almost wanton savagery, it showed Spinoza's influence from beginning to end. Not alone did it attack the conception of a supernatural God; in addition it assailed the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and the whole doctrine of Bible infallibility. Indeed, so much did it contain—in crudely garbled form—of what Spinoza was writing in his then still unfinished treatise, that one wonders whether the disciple might not have read some of the manuscript. But what he produced was no more than a vituperative pamphlet prepared in obvious haste.

Koerbagh was immediately called to account by the clerical authorities in Amsterdam, and with him his brother Jan. Both of them had already had difficulties with those authorities on account of their outspoken heresies, and now that Adriaan had dared to publish his inflammatory pamphlet, matters were brought to a head. The two men were ordered arrested, and Adriaan, who realized that he alone had actually laid himself open to condemnation, fled to a village near Utrecht, where he was beyond reach of the Amsterdam magistrates. His brother remained behind, and though there was no clear evidence against him, he was condemned to twelve years imprisonment and a huge fine. On appeal the verdict was reversed—but only after he had spent some ten weeks in jail, and had paid the court costs of his trial.

Adriaan, however, did not get off so lightly. A treacherous friend betrayed him into the hands of the Amsterdam police for a price, and he was put on trial for his heresies. Terrified by the attitude of his judges, he offered to recant; but that did not appease their wrath. One of them actually urged that a just penalty would be the confiscation of the culprit's fortune, the amputation of his right thumb, the piercing of his tongue with a red-hot iron, and imprisonment for thirty years! And the sentence finally agreed upon, though less barbarous, was still grotesquely severe. Adriaan Koerbagh was condemned to pay a fine of six thousand florins, and to suffer ten years in prison at hard labor and an equal term in exile! And thereupon he was removed to the foul *rasphuis,* where he had to split wood all day long. The wretched man was far too weak for the toil; yet if he lagged, he was flung into a dungeon at the mouth of the prison sewer, where he had to pump continuously to keep from drowning. It was impossible for him to endure such torture. After a few weeks in the terrible prison he began to languish, and within a year he was dead!

It was this outrage that broke Spinoza's hold on his temper. Conciliation was out of the question after that; he simply *had* to speak out plainly. And he did so in the preface which he was then writing—the body of the treatise was evidently already finished by that time—committing himself there to opinions which were as novel as they were daring.

> "Doomed indeed is any land [he wrote], where opinions are put on trial and condemned as crimes, and where those who avow them are sacrificed, not to public safety, but to the hatred and savagery of their enemies. . . . Deeds alone should be made the grounds of criminal charges, and speech should be utterly free. . . . Every man should be allowed to think what he likes and say what he thinks . . . [for]

> without such freedom there cannot be any peace or true piety. . . . [Because there was no such freedom in the past] the only piety that existed was a masked superstition, and the only religion a reverence for ecclesiastics. Every worthless churl became inflamed with a passion to enter holy orders, and the love of spreading God's truth degenerated into sordid avarice and ambition. Every church became a theater where orators instead of religious teachers harangued the masses . . . striving only to attract admiration, to bring their opponents to public scorn, and to preach only novelties and paradoxes calculated to tickle the ears of the congregants. . . . Nothing survives of the primitive faith . . . and religion has become a mere compound of credulity and prejudices . . . degrading man from a rational being to a beast, and completely destroying the power to judge between truth and falsehood. . . . Piety and religion—great God! They are become but a tissue of ridiculous mysteries. And men who frankly despise reason, who reject and scorn understanding as naturally evil, these, I say, these of all men are thought—O lie most horrible!—to possess light from on High! Verily, if they had but one spark of that light from on High, they would not so insolently rave, but would learn to worship God wisely, and would be as marked among their fellows for mercy as they are now for malice!" . . .

Thus did Spinoza vent himself. There was passion in his words, passion long restrained, but now let loose at last. And once those words were written, Spinoza could not bring himself to suppress them. He copied them out deliberately, prefaced them to the treatise, and then despatched the whole manuscript to Amsterdam.

And having done that, he gathered up his belongings and circumspectly cleared out of Voorburg.

CHAPTER VI

HE moved to The Hague. He had no clear idea of how daring was the treatise he had just written; but he did see that it might conceivably cause a stir. So he thought it wiser to leave the village while all was still quiet, and take refuge in the capital. His friends there had long been begging him to do that, not alone because they feared for his safety in Voorburg, but also because they desired to be able to see him with greater ease. He had by now acquired a great number of friends in The Hague, all of whom, says Colerus, were "distinguished by the Quality, or by Civil and Military Employment." And Spinoza, "never indifferent to the sincere affection of well-meaning people"—these are Lucas's words—agreed at last to do their bidding.

He found room and board in the house of a widow named Van Velden, who lived on a back wharf called the Stille Veerkade, the "quiet ferry-dock." * It was in

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* The house still stands there—it is number 32—but it has obviously been much altered since Spinoza's day, as has also the wharf, which is now an ordinary narrow street, the canal having long ago been filled in.

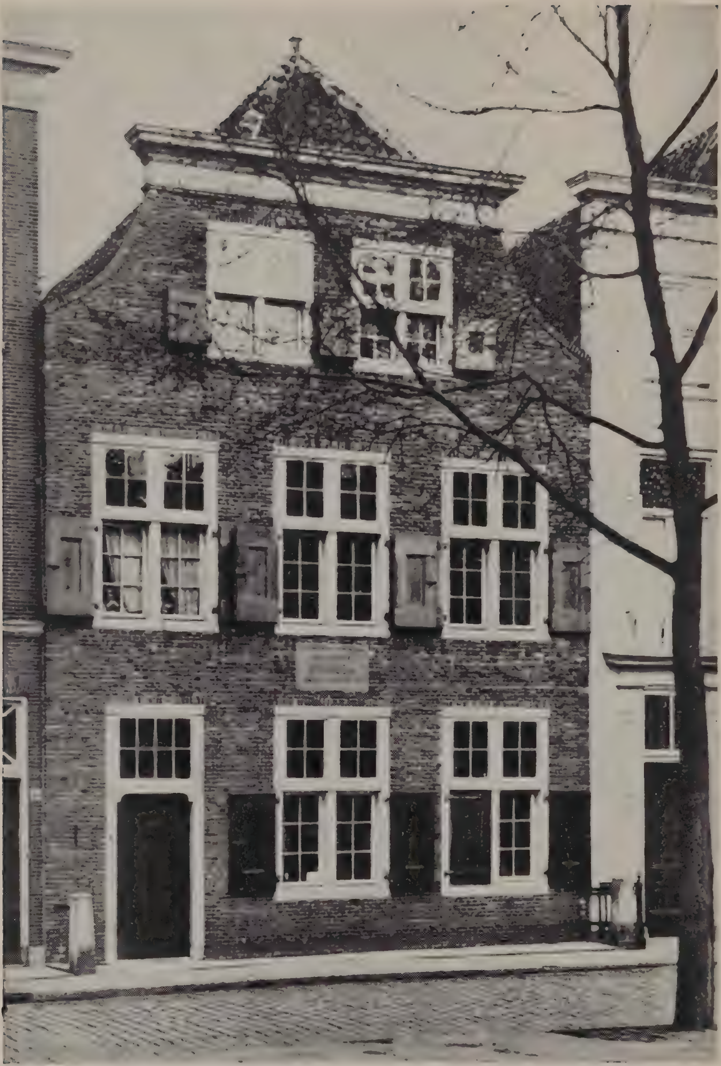
this same house that Colerus took lodgings when he was called to the pastorate of the local Lutheran Church twenty-odd years later, and it was there that he wrote the biographical sketch which has stood us in such good stead. Indeed, he occupied the very room which had been Spinoza's—"at the further end of the House backward, [up] two pair [flights] of Stairs."

Settled in this rear attic chamber, the philosopher waited for the appearance of his book. One imagines he was somewhat excited. For years now Oldenburg, and probably many of his other friends, had been urging him to publish his opinions; and always he had pleaded that the time was not yet ripe. But now at last he was crossing his Rubicon. True, he was following what was a common custom in that age, and publishing his treatise anonymously. Even the printer, who was no doubt Jan Rieuwertsz, a hardened purveyor of anticlerical literature, was not confessing his connection with the book. (The title-page of the volume gave the publisher's name as Henricus Künraht, and the place of publication as Hamburg.) But Spinoza knew that the authorship would not long remain a secret, and he could not but have been somewhat apprehensive.

He lived a very secluded life now, going out only rarely, and receiving very few visitors. Colerus reports—presumably on the basis of what the widow Van Velden told him—that at times the philosopher did not leave his room for two or three days together, and would very often have his meals brought to him there.

Whether this was because he was in especially bad health, or because he was driven by work, we are not told. There can be no doubt that he had need to toil assiduously now, for the cost of living was higher here than in Voorburg. True, Spinoza was now receiving a regular allowance, but it was hardly enough for his needs. It came to him from the estate of Simon de Vries, who had died in 1667; and it might have been much larger had it not been for the philosopher's scruples. Actually Simon de Vries had tried to make him his sole heir; but Spinoza had refused to allow it. He had argued that though the merchant had no dependents, he did have a brother who ought of right to be his heir; and De Vries had had to agree to that. But on the man's death it was found that he had nevertheless remembered Spinoza in his will, leaving him a legacy of five hundred florins a year. It was not a large sum—even a secondary professor in a university usually received no less than six hundred a year—and was barely enough to support a single man in the most modest comfort. Yet Spinoza insisted it was "too considerable" an amount. Years earlier he had come to the conclusion that the wise "endeavor to obtain only sufficient money or other commodities to enable [them] to preserve [their] life and health." Therefore he refused now to accept more than three hundred a year, for that, he insisted, was quite sufficient for his needs.

But if that had been enough in Voorburg, it was not enough in The Hague; and Spinoza seems to have tried



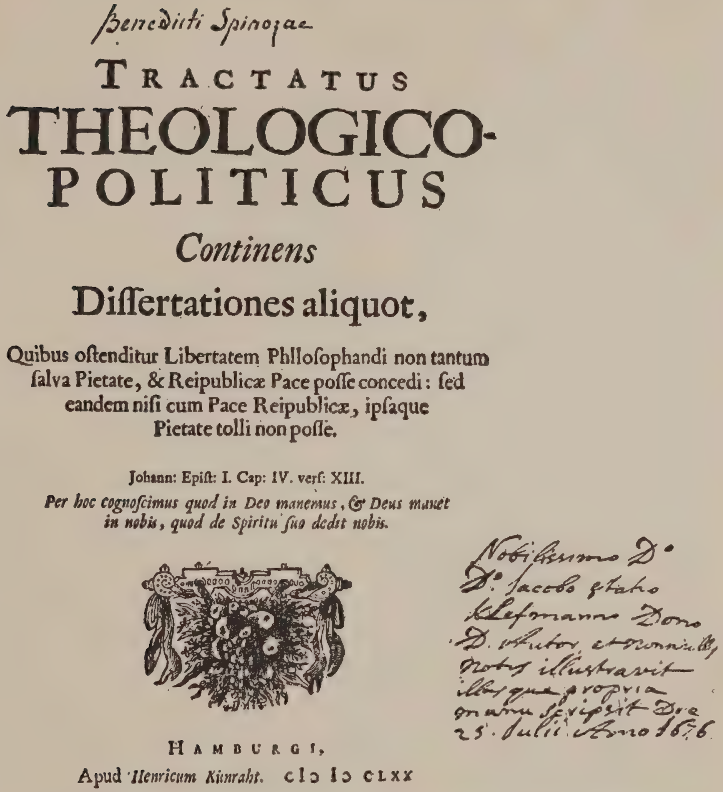
THE DOMUS SPINOZANA ON THE PAVILJOENSGRAGT
Spinoza lived in the rear attic chamber from 1671 until his death in 1677.

to eke out the rest by working at his trade. Before long, however, he evidently found the strain too great, for he began to seek cheaper quarters. The widow Van Velden would not rent the room without board, and Spinoza, who had learnt to eat with exceeding frugality, decided he could save something if he provided his own food. Accordingly he moved to a house on the next street, the Paviljoensgragt, where the people were content to take him just as a lodger.

The house still stands there, and is now one of the sights of the city. (Like the one in Rijnsburg, it was purchased not many years ago by devoted Spinozists and turned into a museum, the "Domus Spinozana"). The neighborhood has since become rather shady in character—ironically, the very house in which the philosopher lived is known to have been a brothel at the beginning of this century—but in earlier times it was, if poor, at least respectable. Spinoza's landlord was that Hendrik van der Spyck whom Colerus quotes so frequently, a poor but honorable citizen who was by calling a painter and decorator. His house, which, of course, fronted on a canal, was a typical Dutch town-dwelling of that period, modest, unimaginative, but solid. The philosopher occupied only the rear chamber in the attic, a tiny place, but enough for his humble needs. On one side, right under the sloping roof, he put his bed, and by the window looking out over the neighboring chimneys he set his table and tools. Against the other wall he may have set a case for his books—which by now were very numerous for a man in his circumstances—and if in addition to his chair he had an extra stool, the place must have been too crowded for movement. For it was an exceedingly small chamber.

What means he had for heating it remains a mystery. One can see no place for a stove, and the floor-boards, which have not been relaid in all these centuries, show no signs anywhere of charring. Evidently the poor man simply wrapped himself in his robes when the chill damp of winter crept into the room. And he must have sat by the open window and gasped in summer, for the steep roof came down almost to the floor. Yet in that cramped and comfortless attic chamber Spinoza lived out the last five and a half years of his life. As is still evident from the heavy decoration on the door of the chamber, and also on the door of the diminutive closet near the bedstead, an attempt was made at some time to beautify the place. Perhaps the landlord was responsible for that valiant effort, for the design, done in several coats of still lustrous paint, clearly betrays the handiwork of a professional decorator. But those touches of color could only have heightened the drabness of the cubicle. Yet Spinoza seems to have been quite content with the place,—so content that at times he did not leave it for weeks on end.

And it was while living in this attic on the Paviljoensgragt that Spinoza at last saw the publication of his *Treatise on Theology and Politics*. The book appeared some time in 1670, and his very copy has come down to



Benedicti Spinozae

TRACTATUS
THEOLOGICO-
POLITICUS
Continens
Diſſertationes aliquot,
Quibus oſtenditur Libertatem Philoſophandi non tantum
ſalva Pietate, & Reipublicæ Pace poſſe concedi: ſed
eandem niſi cum Pace Reipublicæ, ipſaque
Pietate tolli non poſſe.

Johann: Epiſt: I. Cap: IV. verſ: XIII.
Per hoc cognoſcimus quod in Deo manemus, & Deus manet
in nobis, quod de Spiritu ſuo dedit nobis.

Nobilissimo D°
D°. Jacobo Statio
Klefmanno Dono
D. Autor, et nonnullis
notis illustravit
illasque propria
manu scripsit Die
25. Julii Anno 1676.

HAMBURGI,
Apud *Henricum Künraht.* CIↃ IↃ CLXX

TITLE-PAGE OF THE "TREATISE ON THEOLOGY AND POLITICS"

(*The autograph reads: "To Mr. James Statius Klefmann the Author gave this book and with his own hand inscribed in it some Annotations—July 23rd, 1676."*)

us, with his own Latin signature neatly written on the title-page. How his frail hands must have trembled as they held that volume! How his eyes must have devoured the print! For here at last were his own opinions

—not Descartes' but his very own—set down so that all the learned world might read. . . .

And all the learned world did read—and swiftly informed the unlearned world about it. The book caused a furor, and soon half the pastors in Holland were thundering against its heresies. The ill-fame of the treatise spread almost at once to England, France, and wherever else there were inquiring minds. In Germany the book passed rapidly through four editions, three of them issued under false representations to escape the censorship. Once it appeared as a work on surgery by "Dr. Franciscus Henriquez de Villacorta"; then as a treatise on medicine by "Dr. Franciscus de la Boe Sylvius"; and later as a dissertation on history by "Daniel Heinius." Within a few months one of Spinoza's followers in Amsterdam began to prepare a Dutch translation of the work. Later a French translation appeared, first under the ambiguous title, *The Key to the Sanctuary* (ostensibly published by "Pierre Warnaer" at "Leyden"), then as a *Treatise on the Superstitious Ceremonies of the Jews* (published by "Jacob Smith" at "Amsterdam"), and finally as the *Curious Reflections of a Liberal Mind* (published by "Claude Emanuel" at "Cologne").

And the further it spread, the more uproar it caused. As early as May 8, 1670, within a few weeks of its publication, the famous Jacob Thomasius, Professor of Theology at the University of Leipzig—and incidentally the teacher of Leibniz—delivered a fiery denunciation of the "godless" document. Other noted professors joined in the clamor, and throughout Holland and Germany there arose a strident demand for the suppression of the "blasphemous," "immoral," "impudent," "atheistic" treatise. Happily, only few of those who attacked the book knew who was its author. Rumor of his name seems to have got abroad—one outraged preacher, a Johannes Melchior of Bonn, refers to him as "Zinospa"! —but apparently for long it was not discovered that he was a Jew. But even as the work of a Christian, the book seemed unspeakable to the theologians of the day. "My opinion," wrote Professor Mansvelt of Utrecht, "is that it ought to be buried forever in eternal oblivion." "One may very well doubt," declared Dr. Musaeus, Professor of Divinity at Jena, "whether among all the men whom the Devil has hired to overthrow all human and divine right, any of them has been more busy about it than that imposter [Spinoza] who was born to the great mischief of Church and State." And the wordy grain-broker of Dordrecht, Willem van Blyenbergh, announced: "This is a book full of curious but abominable discoveries, the learning and inquiries whereof must needs have been fetched from Hell. Every Christian, nay, every Man of Sense, ought to abhor such a book." Even Colerus, writing thirty years later, could not contain himself when describing the book. "The Lord confound thee, Satan, and stop thy mouth!" he had apostrophized in pious wrath.

But the hostility of the orthodox did not exhaust itself in harsh words. Hardly had the book appeared than the church synods began to campaign for its suppression. The Ecclesiastical Court of Amsterdam, at a special session held on June 30, 1670, decided to bring the matter of the blasphemous publication before the General Synod of the city; and the latter in turn brought the matter before the Synod of North Holland. And that body forthwith passed a resolution utterly condemning the book, and strongly urging its suppression. The Synod of South Holland did likewise, recommending at the same time that the pastors should urge the magistrates in their various communities to prohibit the circulation of the "abominable treatise." The local church bodies in The Hague, Leyden, Utrecht, Dordrecht, Geldern, and numerous other cities, all threw themselves into the campaign. Indeed, within the next five or six years some thirty-seven Church edicts were published in condemnation of this one book!

Spinoza himself, however, was not molested. Even after his responsibility for the book became known—and he finally admitted it freely—no steps were taken against his person. Perhaps this was because his private life was so blameless, and his whole demeanor so patently inoffensive. Or perhaps it was because he was known to have many friends in the government. Hudde, the Burgomaster of Amsterdam, Burgh, the Minister of Finance, and Boxel, the Pensionary of Gorkum—these were all reputed to be his admirers and friends. Above all, there was Jan de Witt, who was still the ruler of the country. It was no secret that he was attached to Spinoza. It was actually rumored that the Grand Pensionary was wont to consort with the free-thinker regularly, stealing into his house through the garden door, and sitting and plotting with him in his attic all night long. No one doubted that De Witt had abetted the publication of Spinoza's treatise. Indeed, in September 1672, when De Witt's possessions were put up at auction—he had been assassinated the month before—the list of his books contained among other items the following:

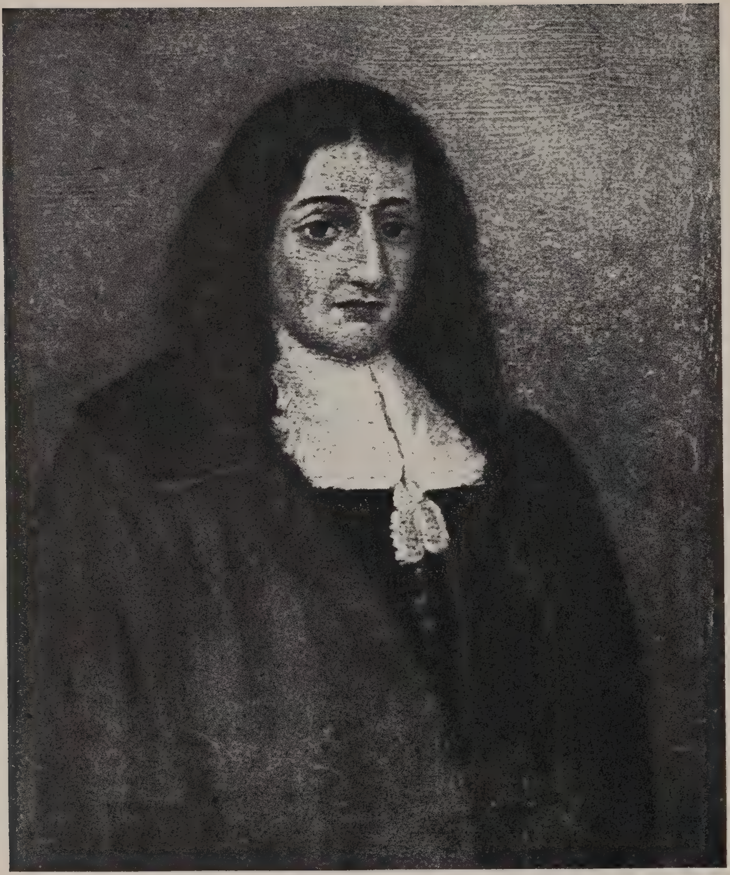
> "Item 33: *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* wrought by the renegade Jew together with the Devil in Hell, and published with the knowledge of Mr. Jan and his accomplices."

But though Spinoza was not directly persecuted, he nevertheless felt bitter dejection at the effect his book had created. Not for a moment had he thought to enrage the bigots or bait the ignorant. He had intended his words only for the "philosophical reader." As he had frankly stated in the preface:

> "To the rest of mankind I care not to recommend my treatise, for I cannot expect that it contains anything to please them. I know how deeply rooted are the prejudices embraced under the name of religion. I am aware that in the minds of the masses superstition is no less deeply rooted than fear. . . . Therefore the multitude, and those of like passions with the multitude, I ask not to read my book. Nay, I would rather that they utterly neglected it than that they should misinterpret it after their wont."

But his words had gone for naught. Far from letting his book go unnoticed, "those of like passions with the multitude" gave it a notoriety which filled Spinoza with distress. He could not bring himself to hate his detractors. As Lucas writes: "Although there is no wound more severe than that inflicted by slander, nor any less easy to bear, he was never heard to express resentment against those who sought to injure him." But if Spinoza showed no animosity against his defamers, he was nonetheless grieved by what they said of him. He had hoped with this book to clear himself of the charge of atheism. But instead he had only convicted himself of that charge, it seemed. Not alone his neighbors, but all Holland now, indeed all Europe, accused him of being a godless man. And apparently there was nothing he could do now to remedy matters. Try all he might, the agitation against him did not abate. When he heard that a Dutch translation was about to be printed in Amsterdam, he wrote in haste to his friend Jarig Jelles, begging the latter to prevent the publication. But even though the request was obeyed, and the Dutch version was not printed, the denunciations continued.

So finally the philosopher determined to pay no further heed to the uproar. To one or two of the less rabid attacks he penned dignified replies; but the rest he simply refused to notice. As he wrote to Jelles concerning one which he had noticed in a book-seller's window in The Hague: "from the little I read of it, I judged it was not worth reading through, let alone answering. . . . I reflected with a smile how the ignorant are always the boldest and the most ready to write." And



SPINOZA AT THE AGE OF 40
from the portrait by Wallerant Vaillant, now in the Mayer Sulzberger Collection, Philadelphia.

that was the attitude he consistently maintained from then on. He was not ashamed of the treatise. On the contrary, he seems to have been proud of it, as is evidenced by the fact that he sent copies of it to Oldenburg, Leibniz, and other of the distinguished men with whom he corresponded. But if he was not ashamed of the book, neither was he content to let it be his final contribution. He had a far greater work to offer his fellowmen, one to which he had already devoted many years of toil, and which he had interrupted only because of the emergency presented by the wave of reaction. He had turned from that work much as a loyal citizen turns from ploughing his field when he hears the call to go to war against an invader. But now, having dealt his blow, and dealt it doughtily, he was eager to return to his ploughing.

So he once more took up his work on the *Ethics*. Four years had elapsed since he had laid that task aside, and more than ten since he had first projected it; yet his ideas had changed very little in the interim. He still believed that the universe is all one, and that man is a mere fleeting incident in it. He still maintained that an absolute necessity governs all that occurs, and that good and evil are purely subjective values. He was still convinced that if a man desires supreme happiness he must so reconcile himself to his finitude as to triumph over it, and thus be freed to take delight in the infinity of which he is a part. And if Spinoza was so steadfast in this philosophy, it was obviously because the whole conception reflected his own experience. For all that he had reasoned it out so logically and objectively, in origin his cosmic scheme was perhaps a product of his own spiritual travail. He himself was lost in society, an outcast Jew without roots anywhere. And his world-view was but an extension and rationalization of his personal plight. If he was lost, so were all other men—if not in society, at least in the universe. They were all finite things swept about in the maelstrom of infinite circumstance. Moreover, just as he, hounded by human beings, had found a home for himself in the world of humane ideas, so must all men, imprisoned though they be by the finite things about them, yet find release in the contemplation of the infinite. Spinoza's philosophy was thus more than a delicate bloom nurtured in the forcing-house of his mind; it was a virile and luxuriant tree rooted in the depths of his soul. Therefore it did not wither with each change of season; it flourished unchanged throughout his life.

He applied himself now to the task of finishing his exposition of this philosophy. There in his attic on the Paviljoensgragt he labored night after night at his propositions and proofs. "Such ardor for the pursuit of truth was burning in him," writes Jarig Jelles in the preface to Spinoza's *Posthumous Works,* "that according to the testimony of those with whom he lodged, he would not go out in the open sometimes for three months on end." That apparently was no exaggeration, for there are other contemporaries who bear witness to it. Kortholt, who evidently inquired of Spinoza's landlord concerning the matter, writes:

> "It is certainly true, as is related by the editor of the Atheist's posthumous works, that he stayed at home for several months at a time. . . . He mostly abstained from human intercourse in the daytime, and devoted himself to his studies far into the night also, toiling over his dark writings by lamplight . . . so that not an hour be lost for the work of his own undoing, and the perdition of others. The accuracy of this is confirmed by Mr. Christ. Nic. von Greiffencrantz, Councillor to His Serene Highness the Duke of Holstein, who associated with Spinosa in The Hague in the seventy-second year of this century [1672], and who said of him in a letter to my father . . . 'he seemed to live all to himself, always lonely, as if buried in his study.'"

Part of the philosopher's time was still spent in grinding lenses, for, no matter how he watched his farthings, he still could not live within the allowance he received from the De Vries estate. Kortholt informs us that the abstemious bachelor spent no more than four hundred florins a year, of which eighty went to pay for his lodging; but even this small amount was a hundred florins in excess of his pension.* And he evidently had to earn the rest by working at his trade.

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* Lucas tells of a pension which Spinoza received from De Witt, but as we have said, there is no documentary evidence to bear out this report. In all likelihood the biographer confused De Witt with De Vries. See Dr. N. Japikse's *Johann de Witt*, 2nd edition, p. 287; and also that author's recent monograph, *Spinoza en De Witt*, 's-Gravenhage, 1927.

> "It is scarce credible," says Colerus, "how sober and frugal he was all the time. . . . [this] may be prov'd by several small Reckonings which have been found amongst his Papers after his death. It appears by them that he lived a whole day upon a Milk-soop done with Butter, which amounted to three pence, and upon a Pot of Beer of three half pence. Another day he [did] eat nothing but Gruel done with Raisins and Butter, and that dish cost him four pence half penny. There are but two half pints of Wine at most for one Month to be found amongst those Reckonings, and tho he was often invited to eat with his Friends, he chose rather to live upon what he had at home. . . . He was very careful to cast up his Accounts every Quarter; which he did, that he might spend neither more nor less than what he could [afford] every year. And he would say sometimes to the people of the House that he was like a Serpent, who forms a Circle with his Tail in his mouth; to denote that he had nothing left at the years end."

His clothing was in keeping with his way of life—simple and inexpensive. His black cloth coat and breeches were neat but worn, and the white neckpiece and cuffs were spotless but frayed. In winter he wore a huge Turkish cloak, and carried a large muff, as was the fashion at the time; but these, too, had seen better days. The only touch of adornment on his costume was a pair of silver buckles for his shoes.

But if he lived and dressed so austerely, it was not from niggardliness. He was always ready to share his mite with any who were in greater need, "lending of what little he had," says Lucas, "with as much generosity as though he were rolling in wealth." There were, apparently, a number of indigent fellows among his acquaintances here in The Hague, down-at-the-heel free-thinkers, many of them refugees from persecution in France, who had no scruples about borrowing even from so poor a man as the consumptive lens-grinder. And he for his part not merely helped them out, but also made no complaint if they failed to repay him. Lucas tells us—and he himself may have been one of Spinoza's beneficiaries—that "when he [the philosopher] learnt that someone who owed him two hundred francs had gone bankrupt, far from being vexed thereat, he merely remarked with a smile, 'I must reduce my daily fare in order to make up for this small loss.' "

No, Spinoza was not niggardly. If he ate so little and dressed so poorly, it was simply because he thought it unnecessary to eat or dress otherwise. As he had declared in his unfinished essay *On the Improvement of the Understanding*, the two most important rules for wise men to follow in an unwise society are:

> "First, to indulge ourselves with pleasures only in so far as they are necessary for preserving health; and second, to endeavor to obtain only sufficient money or other commodities to enable us to preserve our life and health."

And he himself abided by those rules. There was only one extravagance which he permitted himself, and that was the buying of books. Ever since his youth, it seems, he had been collecting a library, and by now it contained well over a hundred volumes. The works were in several languages—Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Spanish, Italian, Dutch—and dealt not alone with philosophy and theology, but also belle-lettres and contemporary science. Such books, however, he considered a highly defensible extravagance on his part, for the pleasure they afforded him was one very necessary for the preservation of his health. They were his meat and drink, and the raiment with which he adorned himself. Indeed, they were his very life.

With his library in the place, the studious bachelor was quite content with his attic on the Paviljoensgragt. He was, says Colerus, "troublesome to no Body when he staid at home," for he kept almost entirely to his own room. There he not merely slept, but also worked and meditated, and prepared and ate his meals. Only rarely would he go downstairs to sit with the Van der Spycks for a little; and then he was always made welcome. They were simply folk, very devout and not at all learned; yet they obviously enjoyed the company of their lodger. The landlord, his wife, even the children, liked to have him in their midst. They all found his conversation "very sweet and easy," and his demeanor always friendly. Learned as he was, he could yet employ the plainest language; and, though devoted to abstruse thought, he could yet enter into the most trifling concerns. Moreover he was a wondrously sympathetic man. The stern, unyielding, almost inhuman logicality which characterized his writings was absent altogether from his everyday speech. He could be depended upon to come with comforting words whenever there was sadness in the household, interrupting his work to sit up with the sick, or to offer cheer to the afflicted. And, though reputed to be a very wicked "Atheist," he was never anything but pious when he conversed with the landlord's family. Colerus tells us that Spinoza would

> "put the Children in mind of going often to Church, and taught them to be obedient and dutiful to their Parents. When the people of the House came from Church, he would often ask them what they had learn'd, and what they cou'd remember of the sermon. He had a great esteem for Dr *Cordes,* my Predecessor, who was a learned and good natured Man, and of an exemplary Life, which gave occasion to *Spinosa* to praise him very often. Nay, he went sometimes to hear him preach, and he esteem'd particularly his learned way of explaining the Scripture, and the solid applications he made of it. He advised at the same time his Landlord and the People of the House, not to miss any Sermon of so excellent a Preacher. . . . It happened one day that his Landlady ask'd him whether he believed she cou'd be saved in the Religion she profest. He answered, *Your Religion is a good one, you need not look for another, nor doubt that you may be saved in it, provided, whilst you apply your self to Piety, you live at the same time a peaceable and quiet Life.*"

That was why he was so beloved by the Van der Spycks. The world might call their lodger a renegade Jew, and a blasphemer, and the Devil incarnate; but they knew better. Dwelling with him under one roof, seeing him day after day, they knew he was a good man. Never did an oath, or a frivolous remark about God, pass his lips. Nor was he ever ill-tempered or churlish.

Lucas tells us that "no matter what the time, one always found him in an even and agreeable humor." And Colerus writes:

> "He knew admirably well how to be the Master of his Passions. He was never seen very melancholy, nor very merry. He had command of his Anger, and if at any time he was uneasy in his mind, it did not appear outwardly; or if he happen'd to express his grief by some gestures, or by some words, he never fail'd to retire immediately, for fear of doing an unbecoming thing."

Only once, so far as our records go, did his control over his passions fail him; and then, characteristically, it was because of a crime committed against another. It happened during the summer of 1672, when he was in the midst of his work on the final part of the *Ethics*. Evil times had befallen the republic. The army of Louis XIV had invaded the Netherlands, approaching at one time to within ten miles of Amsterdam. Only by dint of cutting the dykes and flooding all the region from the Zuyder Zee to the Maas was Holland saved from complete surrender. And the populace, long weary of De Witt's rule, turned on him now in panicky rage. They forgot altogether the mighty victories he had won for them, and the great prosperity he had brought to their land. All they remembered was that he had failed to check this French invasion.

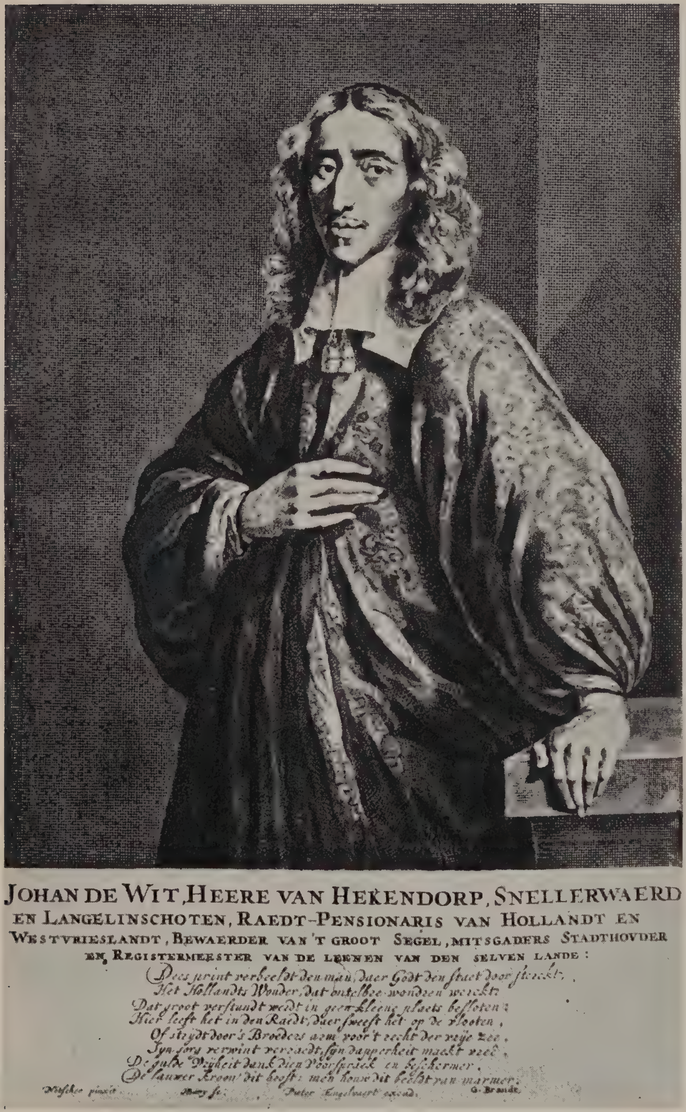
Unable to assail Jan de Witt directly, they pounced upon his brother Cornelis, arresting him on the trumped-up charge of conspiring to murder their idol, the Prince of Orange. They put him to the torture to extract a confession, and though he endured the rack without flinching, they nevertheless adjudged him guilty. Cornelis was sentenced to exile and the loss of all his offices—he had served valiantly as an admiral in many a critical battle—and as he lay in prison awaiting his banishment, he sent word to his brother to visit him. The latter's counsellors begged him not to go, for the mob surrounding the jail was in a murderous mood. But Jan de Witt, never a coward, refused to be deterred. He went down to the prison that same day—August 19—and was admitted to the cell where his brother lay writhing in pain. And as he sat there conversing with him, the rabble outside grew increasingly wild. Three companies of soldiers were drawn up around the prison, and these might have restrained the rioters. But suddenly word came for them to go to the other end of the city, where some bands of marauding peasants were said to be approaching. The commander refused to move his troops without a written order; and when this came—signed by the president of the Commissioned-Councillors, a notorious Orange partisan—the officer exclaimed: "I will obey, but the De Witts are dead men!"

And no sooner were the soldiers gone, than the mob forced the door of the prison and rushed in. They found Jan de Witt sitting at the foot of his brother's bed, calmly reading to him from the Bible. Whereupon they fell upon the two helpless men, dragged them brutally into the street, and there clubbed and stabbed them to death. Not content with that, the infuriated horde kicked and slashed the bodies, and finally hung them up by the feet to a lamp-post. And then for hours they danced around the shameful gibbet, singing and shouting in vengeful glee. . . .

Van der Spyck rushed at once to tell his lodger what had happened over by the Gevangenpoort, and when the latter heard the news, he began to weep with uncontrollable rage. Leaping to his feet, he declared he would run there and then to where the mob was gathered, and denounce it to its drunken face. He would hold aloft a placard bearing the words "Lowest Barbarians!" And he might have actually carried out his intentions had not the landlord restrained him by force. Van der Spyck realized that the frail, stoop-shouldered, consumptive philosopher would be torn to pieces if he dared confront the blood-maddened rabble—and he locked the door to keep him in!

Spinoza soon got control of himself again. Philosopher that he was, he realized that no good could come of an angry outburst, nor of steeping resentment either. And, says Lucas, when one of his friends expressed surprise at his returned calm, Spinoza answered: "Of what use would wisdom be to us, if having succumbed to the passions of the mob, we lacked the strength to recover ourselves again."

With De Witt gone, the liberals in Holland were left leaderless; yet they refused to confess themselves de-


JOHAN DE WIT, HEERE VAN HEKENDORP, SNELLERWAERD
EN LANGELINSCHOTEN, RAEDT-PENSIONARIS VAN HOLLANDT EN
WESTVRIESLANDT, BEWAERDER VAN 'T GROOT SEGEL, MITSGADERS STADTHOVDER
EN REGISTERMEESTER VAN DE LEENEN VAN DEN SELVEN LANDE:
Dees print verbeeldt den man, daer Godt den staet door sterckt,
Het Hollandts Wonder, dat ontelbre wondren werckt:
Dat groot verstandt werdt in geen kleene plaets besloten:
Hier leeft het in den Raedt, daer sweeft het op de vlooten,
Of strydt door 's Broeders arm voor 't recht der vrye zee.
Syn sorg verwint verraedt, syn dapperheit maekt vreê.
De gulde Vryheit dankt dien Voorspraek en beschermer.
De lauwer Kroon dit hooft: men houw dit beeldt van marmer.
Netscher pinxit
Bary fe.
Peter Engelvaert excud.
G. Brandt

JAN DE WITT

feated. They continued to struggle against the monarchists and their clerical henchmen, hoping against hope that the day might yet be saved. And in their extremity they kept resorting to Spinoza for counsel. They did not dare do this openly, for had it been known that they even associated with the notorious free-thinker, it would have hurt them irremediably. Yet they recognized in him one of the clearest minds in Holland, and they knew they could profit by his sage advice. So they sought him out where he lived on the quiet Paviljoensgragt, informing him of the events of the day and inviting his opinions. As Kortholt puts it: "He answered to the name of Politician, and with his understanding and his knowledge he shrewdly foresaw future events which he not infrequently foretold to his visitors."

Such visits interrupted his writing, but it was impossible for him to avoid them. No matter how much he sought seclusion, people continued to call on him. Not alone his own countrymen clambered the steep steps to his attic chamber, but also numerous foreigners. The free-thinking émigrés who lived in The Hague—men like that Lucas whose biography we have so frequently quoted—evidently looked to Spinoza as their master, and tried to be in his company all the time. And learned gentlemen passing through the Dutch capital tried to catch at least a glimpse of the famous "Atheist." Indeed, it is reported that those who failed to lay eyes on him considered their stay in the town wasted. We read that the philosopher was visited by Henault, the French poet, Greiffencranz, the ambassador of the Duke of Holstein, Professor Pufendorf, the famous German jurist, Vroesen, the Court Councillor of Brabant, Professor Sturm of Altdorf, and a number of noble ladies whose names have not come down to us. Many of these may have called on him for no better reason than that which Professor Sturm confessed: "out of curiosity to see what the exotic creature looked like!" But if they did, they came away in a quite altered moood. And, save in the case of some of the conservative academicians, they carried reports back to their homelands which only increased Spinoza's renown. Scholars in distant cities who had never even met him began to send him their publications and invite his correspondence. For instance, in October 1671, the young German scientist and statesman, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, addressed a most ingratiating letter to "Mr. Spinoza, the very celebrated Doctor * and very profound Philosopher," subscribing himself "your sincere admirer." The letter began:

> "Illustrious and Most Honorable Sir,
>
> Among the other praises of you which report has bruited abroad, I understand, is your great skill in optics. This has made me wish to submit my essay, such as it is, to you, than whom I shall not easily find a better judge in this field of research. . . ."

That the proud and quite conservative Baron von Leibniz should have used such terms in addressing

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* The term "Doctor" (*Médecin*) was then used in the sense of "man of science."

Spinoza, reveals plainly how the latter's fame had spread. But what is even more revealing is the fact that he was actually offered a professorship! Without any solicitation on his part Spinoza was asked to take the chair of philosophy at the University of Heidelberg. The offer came to him in February 1673 in a letter from one J. Louis Fabritius, Councillor to the Elector Palatine. It read:

> "Most Renowned Sir,
>
> His Serene Highness the Elector Palatine, my most gracious Master, has commanded me to write to you—who are as yet unknown to me, but most highly commanded to his Serene Highness the Prince—to ask you whether you are willing to accept an ordinary [full] Professorship of Philosophy in his Illustrious University. You will be paid the annual salary which the ordinary Professors enjoy today. You will not find elsewhere a Prince more favorable to distinguished geniuses, among whom he reckons you. You will have the utmost freedom of philosophizing, which he believes you will not misuse to disturb the publicly established Religion. I could not but comply with the request of the most wise Prince. Therefore I most earnestly beg you to answer me as soon as possible, and to entrust your answer to the care of Mr. Grotius, his Serene Highness the Elector's Resident at The Hague . . . to be forwarded in the packet of letters which they are wont to send to the Court. . . . I will only add this, that if you come here you will live pleasantly a life worthy of a Philosopher, unless everything turns out contrary to our hope and expectation. So Farewell and Hail to you, Most honored Sir. . . ."

Spinoza must have gasped when he first read that letter. A professorship at so great a university as Heidelberg was a distinction which any man of learning might covet, and which some were able to achieve only by dint of the most shameless pleading. For an avowed freethinker and an outcast Jew to be offered such an honor—and without solicitation—was something unheard of! What should he do? Accept? It was very tempting. Not for the salary, but because of the security which the position might bring him. The ruler of the Palatine was famed throughout Europe for his liberalism—he was a brother of that Queen Christina of Sweden who had made such a fuss over Descartes—and in his service an enlightened scholar was almost certain of protection. . . . But yet—how sure could he be of that? Did not the letter say specifically that he would have to be careful not to disturb "the publicly established Religion"? Besides, what of the duties that were incumbent on a professor? Spinoza had no fear that he was unequipped to lecture on philosophy, for he knew well what were his accomplishments in the field. ("One who despises himself is nearest to a vain man," he had already declared in the book he was now writing.) But, no matter how well he might know his subject, lecturing on it would take time. . . .

One can picture the man sitting there in his chill attic and pondering the problem. What troubled him most was that sentence about disturbing the established religion. He wondered: Could it be that the Prince did not even know that he, Spinoza, was an avowed free-thinker?* It would seem so from that sentence. A whole month he continued to debate that question; and then finally he decided to put it out of his mind. On the thirtieth of March he sat down and wrote to Fabritius:

> "Most Honorable Sir,
>
> If I had entertained a wish to accept a Professorship in any faculty, I could have desired no other than that which is offered me through you by His Serene Highness the Elector Palatine, particularly because of that freedom of philosophizing which the Most Gracious Prince is pleased to offer, to say nothing of my long-felt desire to live under the rule of a Prince whose wisdom all admire. Since, however, it was never my intention to give public instruction, I cannot be induced to embrace this glorious opportunity, although I have debated the matter with myself so long. For, first, if I want to find time for instructing youth, then I must desist from developing my philosophy. Secondly, I do not understand within what limits that freedom of philosophizing must be confined in order to avoid the appearance of wishing to disturb the publicly established

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* That question, incidentally, has not yet been settled. Apparently Spinoza was recommended by a certain Urbain Chevreau, a learned nobleman who travelled a good deal and was a familiar in many European courts. According to this man's own memoirs: "At the court of the Prince I spoke very favorably about Spinoza, although I knew of this protestant Jew only from the *First and Second Parts of Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*. . . . The Prince had this book, and after I read out to him a few chapters from it, he decided to invite him to his University of Heidelberg, to teach Philosophy there, but with the condition that he should not dogmatize." (Chevreau, Vol. II, p. 100, ed. 1700.) Prof. Wolf, however, suggests that the Elector Palatine may have been well aware of the fact that Spinoza had written the *Treatise on Theology and Politics*, and that it was this work that most attracted him to the philosopher. (Wolf, *Correspondence of Spinoza*, p. 441.)

> Religion. For theological disputes arise not so much from an ardent love of religion as from men's various dispositions, or the love of contradiction. . . . I have already experienced these things while leading a private and solitary life; much more are they to be feared after I shall have risen to this degree of dignity. Thus you see, Most Honored Sir, that I am not holding back in the hope of some better fortune, but from love of peace, which I believe I can obtain to a certain extent merely by refraining from public lectures. Therefore I most earnestly beg you to pray his Most Serene Highness the Elector to allow me to give the matter further consideration, and also to win the favor of the most gracious Prince for his most devoted admirer. Thereby you will oblige all the more,
>
> Most Honorable and Noble Sir,
> Yours entirely,
> B.d.S."

It was an astounding thing to do—fantastic, almost incredible. Yet as it turned out, the fortunes of war put an unexpected seal of approval on Spinoza's decision, for the following year Heidelberg was seized by the French, and the University was closed. So Spinoza did not lose by his refusal of the professorship; he would have lost had he accepted it. . . .

He went on with his writing. Serenely, patiently, he continued to build that temple of reason which had become his life-work. But within a few weeks another invitation came to him, this one even more extraordinary than the first. Out of a clear sky a letter arrived inviting his presence at the court of the Prince of Condé, commander of the French army then invading the Netherlands. It came from Utrecht, where the Prince had established his headquarters, and it was written by one of his officers, a certain Swiss mercenary named Stouppe. From what we can gather—the letter is no longer extant—it informed Spinoza that the French nobleman, being aware of his great accomplishments as a philosopher, desired to meet him in person and converse with him.

If Spinoza gasped at the letter from Heidelberg, he must have laughed grimly at this one. He knew, of course, that the Prince of Condé was a great patron of letters who delighted to surround himself with men of genius. But he also knew that the battalions of this Prince had brought ruin to the republic, ploughing bloody furroughs across two-thirds of the land, and now threatening to overrun the rest. Spinoza, a patriot to the core, must have thought it monstrous that he should even be expected to accept hospitality at the hands of such a man.

But when he reported the invitation to his friends in the government circles, they seemed to regard it in another light. There were some among them, most prominently Hugo Boxel, who had long been in favor of coming to terms with France. They saw that this war was exhausting their land, and they feared that if it was not soon ended, Holland would be utterly destroyed. And it occurred to them that here was a means of effecting a rapprochement with the enemy. Spinoza had no official connection with the Dutch government, so that if his overtures were rejected, it would bring no humiliation to his countrymen. He was merely a private citizen, and one whom the Prince of Condé would be certain to listen to with respect. Who knew? Perhaps this infidel Jew who was so despised and abominated in the land might yet prove an instrument of its salvation.

This is sheer conjecture, of course, for all the original records concerning this episode appear to have been discreetly destroyed. All we know for certain is that Spinoza did accept the invitation. Armed with letters of safe-conduct from both Holland and France, he made the journey to Utrecht some time in May 1673. But when he presented himself at the French headquarters there, he discovered that the Prince of Condé had been called elsewhere only a day or two earlier. He was received, however, with great civility by the Swiss officer named Stouppe, and also the Duke of Luxembourg, both of whom assured him of the Prince's earnest wish that he wait. So the humble, poorly-clad, sickly Jew proceeded to make himself at home in the court. If we are to believe Lucas, he bore himself with excellent grace in these strange surroundings.

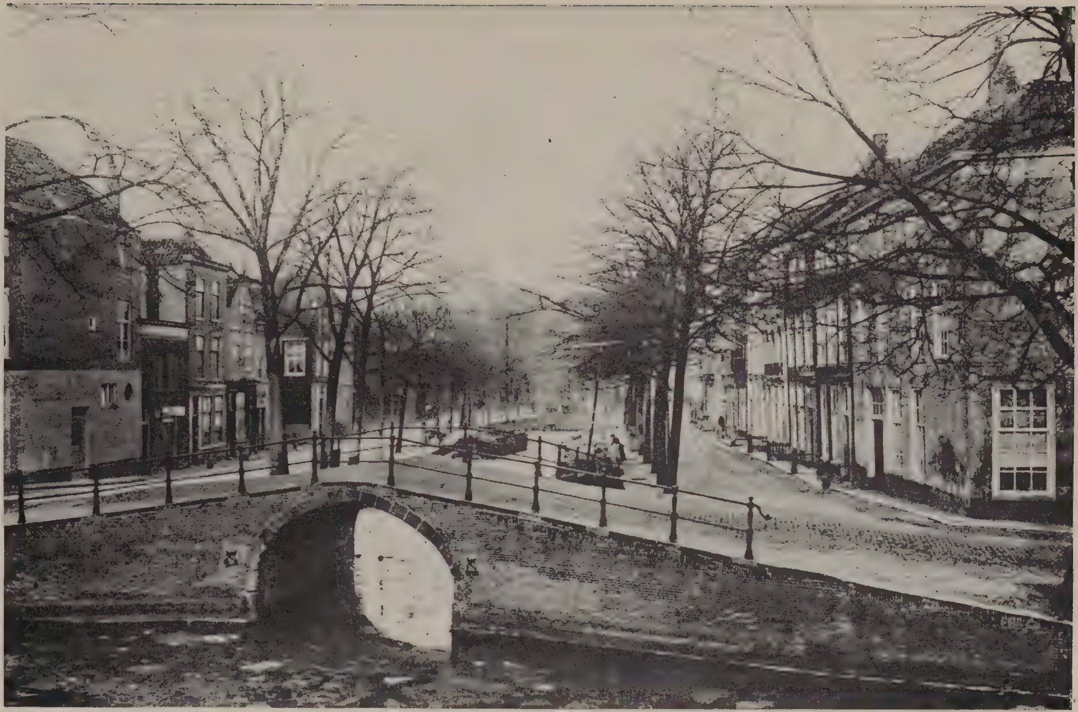
> "The crowd of courtiers did not awe our philosopher [for] he had a gentility which was more like that of the Court than of the commercial city in which he was born. And although this kind of life was utterly opposed to his principles and his taste, he submitted to it with as much amiability as the courtiers themselves. The Prince, who was still eager to see him, sent word from time to time that he should stay on. And the curious-minded [among the officers] were delighted that His Highness obliged him to wait, for they liked him and found ever new attractions in him."

Chief among these "curious-minded"—at least, so we gather from Colerus—was Lieutenant-Colonel Stouppe. Indeed, from certain indications it would appear that he it was who had prompted the Prince to invite Spinoza. The Swiss was a former Calvinist preacher who had since fallen from grace, and was now quite content to fight on the side of a Catholic monarch against his own co-religionists. He was still interested in theology, however, and was apparently engaged in writing a book on the sectarian situation in Holland. Quite likely it had been in the hope of gathering information on the subject from Spinoza that he had urged his invitation to Utrecht. And now that he had the free-thinker there, "he lived very intimately with him," reports a contemporary. According to Spinoza's own testimony—as repeated many years later to Colerus by Van der Spyck—Stouppe assured him that there would be no difficulty in getting him a pension from Louis XIV, if the philosopher would but dedicate a book to the great monarch. (According to another account, it was the Prince of Condé himself who gave him that assurance.) But Spinoza, "with all the civility he was capable of," begged to be allowed to refuse the generous offer.

One imagines that the philosopher, for all that such flattering attentions were paid to him by the dilettante courtiers, was far from happy in their midst. The life they led was, as Lucas remarks, opposed to his principles and his taste; and if he stayed on at the court, it was solely because he was eager to fulfil the secret mission which had brought him there. Stouppe and the other officers showed him "a thousand devotions," yet, as week followed week and the Prince still failed to appear, the philosopher grew impatient to leave. Finally, when word arrived that Condé could not possibly return to Utrecht for some time, Spinoza, "in spite of the gratifying offers which were made to him by the Duke of Luxembourg," departed immediately.

He had failed in his mission. His whole visit had been in vain, and as Spinoza struggled to make his way back through the war-torn countryside, he must have regretted the entire adventure. Its full cost he did not learn until several months later, when Stouppe's book was published. That scoundrel, intent on justifying his conduct in fighting against the Dutch, tried to show in his book about them that, despite their protestations, they were not at all a religious folk. And he therefore took occasion to say:

> ". . . After having described all the many religions in this land, I ought to mention the presence of a certain famous and learned man who, I am informed, has numerous followers here. . . . This man, whose name is Spinoza, is by birth a Jew, and he has neither forsworn Judaism nor accepted Christianity; indeed, he is a wicked Jew and no better Christian. Not many years ago he wrote a Latin book entitled *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in which he sought to destroy all religions, especially Judaism and Christianity, and set in their place Atheism, Immorality, and Irreligion. . . . Said Spinoza lives in this land. He lived for a time in The Hague, where he was sought out by all people eager for knowledge, and even by aristocratic ladies who flattered



THE PAVILJOENSGRAGT, THE HAGUE

before the canal was filled in. Spinoza's house is in the distance on the right-hand side of the street.

> themselves that they were emancipated from the limitations of their sex. His disciples do not dare proclaim themselves such, for his book, which thoroughly destroys all religions, has been suppressed by the government. Nevertheless, the book is still being sold openly. . . ."

But even before Spinoza saw that treacherous attack, he suffered enough other annoyance on account of his futile visit. Rumor of his stay in the camp of the enemy had got abroad in The Hague, and no sooner was he back in his house than a mob gathered outside and threatened to lay hold of him. They knew nothing of the real purpose of his journey, and they were therefore convinced that Spinoza had been up to some treachery. Those thick-headed bargees and costermongers were naturally suspicious of the mysterious, foreign-looking man who lived so quietly in their midst. Few among them had ever come near enough to him to learn his true character; few, indeed, even knew what he looked like. In all likelihood most of them accepted the common grog-shop report that he was "a little man with a yellowish complexion who had the stamp of a reprobate on his face." And, besotted with beer and patriotism, those yahoos stood there in the street and—says Colerus—"whispered in one another's Ears that they ought to kill so dangerous a man." Poor Van der Spyck was terrified, for it looked as though the rabble would break down the door. But Spinoza remained calm. "Fear nothing on my account," he told the landlord. "I can easily justify myself. There are People enough, and even some of the most considerable Persons of the State, who know very well what put me upon that journey." And, seeing that the man was still very nervous, Spinoza hastened to add: "As soon as the Mob makes the least noise at your Door, I'll go out and meet them, tho' they were to treat me as they treated poor Messieurs de Wit. I am a good Republican, and I always aimed at the Glory and Welfare of the State."

Happily nothing happened. The crowd, still growling menacingly, at last dispersed, and all became quiet again on the Paviljoensgragt. But thereafter Spinoza never again allowed himself to be embroiled in governmental affairs. He realized that he was a man of thought rather than action, so he stayed quietly in his attic and went on with his writing.

All the rest of that year he went on with his writing, and the following year, too. His disciples, among whom portions of what he had finished of the *Ethics* were now circulating more and more freely, wrote to him occasionally for further enlightenment. And he, albeit with reluctance, interrupted his labors to reply to them, sometimes at considerable length. But save for such correspondence he devoted his leisure almost entirely to the still unfinished manuscript. The agitation against the *Treatise on Theology and Politics* had at last culminated in the suppression of the book. But Spinoza refused to be disturbed by that. Patiently, doggedly, he went on with his work on the *Ethics*.

CHAPTER VII

AND finally, some time in the spring of 1675, his great book was finished. It was, as the world now realizes, one of the most extraordinary documents ever created by man. From beginning to end it was like the universe which it described: a self-sustaining, self-coherent, perfectly organized unity. Each part depended upon every other part with the necessity and inevitability of the equations in a complicated mathematical calculation. Indeed, the whole work was not unlike a mathematical text-book. Its essential ideas we have already indicated earlier in this chronicle, for, as has been said, Spinoza's point of view remained fundamentally unchanged from the time he wrote that early draft entitled the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-being*. He opened the *Ethics* with his proof of the existence of that infinite Substance which he called God. Since this Substance is infinite, he argued, nothing can exist outside of it. Therefore God and Nature—by which he meant the whole universe—are identical and one. In this God-Nature all things are related as are the equations which follow from the nature of a geometrical figure. There are no conceivable purposes, no final ends, in the cosmic scheme. The universe is what it is—just as a triangle is what it is. Man is a part of the cosmic scheme. Therefore he is absolutely determined in all that he does. He is so constituted that he must strive for his self-preservation, and the character of his striving makes up his moral history. Those things which further his self-preservation he calls good; but they are not good in any universal or eternal sense. All such values—good, bad, ugly, beautiful—are human prejudices and therefore altogether relative. By the same token, they are not the causes of desire, but the consequences. We do not desire things because they are good; we call them good because we desire them; and we desire them because we must.

All human actions obey laws as fixed as those of mathematics. Therefore Spinoza sought to describe human behavior with mathematical objectivity. He was convinced that the elements of psychology no less than those of physics could be adequately expressed in a series of geometrical definitions, axioms, theorems, and corollaries. "I shall consider human actions and desires precisely as if I were dealing with lines, surfaces, and solids," he promised. And he did just that in the *Ethics.* All emotions, he showed, can be divided into two basic forms: active and passive. The active ones are accompanied by pleasure or joy; the passive by pain or grief. Pleasure and pain, however, are not fixed states; they are rather transitions. When a man does something which furthers his preservation, which gives him power, he experiences pleasure. Therefore an emotion is not good or bad in itself, but only as it increases or decreases an individual's power. Now power is identical with virtue. (The Latin *virtus* does actually mean "strength.") "The more a man can preserve his being and seek what is useful to him, the greater is his virtue." Therefore it is vain to try to build a system of morals on the idea of altruism. (As he had already pointed out in his *Treatise on Theology and Politics,* "no one ever forgoes anything which he judges to be good, except with the hope of gaining a greater good.") Man is not naturally good, any more than he is naturally wicked; he just naturally *is.* Consequently the only valid basis for judgment of human conduct is the admission of a necessary and justifiable egoism in all human beings.

With this in mind, Spinoza then proceeded to evaluate the various emotions or passions. Those which give strength to the individual, the positive and pleasurable ones, he wrote down as virtues; the others he called defects. For instance, humility, if it is unreasonable, is a defect, for it implies absence of power, and characterizes either the hypocrisy of a mountebank or the timidity of a slave. Similarly remorse is a defect: "he who repents is twice unhappy and doubly weak." Above all, hate is evil, for it is a confession of inferiority. . . . On the other hand, emotions like modesty, devotion, gratitude, and above all love—these are all signs of power, and are therefore good.

These passions, good or bad, are all reasonless—"inadequate ideas," as Spinoza called them. There is a sort of individualism among them, each striving for its own self-preservation, regardless of the good of the whole personality. Therefore if a man is to be happy, he must coördinate his reasonless passions so that they become a reasoned element in his life. The instincts by themselves are blind driving forces; it is the intellect alone that can see and guide. So the thing first to be cultivated is reason. For it is reason alone that can release a man from bondage to his appetites, and thus make him free to preserve his being. In other words, it is reason alone that can make him supremely happy.

Now reason is the capacity for understanding things, and as this understanding is extended, so does the happiness of the individual increase. Therefore he who strives to understand everything is the most happy of men. Now, to understand is equivalent to loving with the mind, and everything is a synonym for God; therefore the happiest man is he who is full of the "*amor Dei intellectualis,*" the "reasoned love of God." He does not need to wait for happiness as a *reward* for his love; the love is *itself* his happiness. His consummate sense of oneness with the universe, his perfect serenity of mind as a part of the eternal and perfect scheme of things—that in itself is his blessedness. As Spinoza put it in the final proposition of the book:

> "Blessedness is not the reward for virtue, but is virtue itself; nor should we rejoice in it *because we restrain our*

> *lusts,* but, on the contrary, *because we rejoice therein,* therefor we restrain our lusts."

And with that climacteric theorem proved, Spinoza added as his last note:

> "Thus I have completed all I wished to know concerning the power of the mind over emotions, or the freedom of the mind. From which it is clear how much a wise man is in advance of, and how much stronger, than an ignorant one who is guided by lust alone. . . . For the wise man, in so far as he is wise, is scarcely ever disturbed in spirit: he is conscious of himself, of God, and things as a certain eternal necessity; he never ceases to be, and always enjoys satisfaction of mind. If the road I have shown to lead to this is very difficult, it can yet be discovered. And clearly it must be very difficult since it is so seldom found. . . . But all excellent things are as difficult as they are rare."

Thus ended the *Ethics.* Twelve long years Spinoza had labored interruptedly on that book; but at last it was done. Not a paragraph in it but had repeatedly been revised, not a sentence but had again and again been rewritten. And now the whole thing stood there like a beautiful Greek temple, each stone in its walls accurately hewn and perfectly laid, all the columns symmetrically spaced and unshakably grounded. "I do not claim that I have found the best Philosophy," he declared several months later. "But I know this—that I think the true one. If you ask me how I know this, I can only answer: in the same way that you know the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles." It was all as certain as that to him!

And, being so certain, he knew he must share his knowledge with others. "The good which the man of virtue desires for himself," reads one of the theorems in the Fourth Part of the *Ethics*, "he also desires for other men." And Spinoza, who laid down that proposition, was intent on proving it in action. He was determined to publish the book he had just completed, so that others might learn of his way of salvation. Therefore, once he had written that final paragraph, he blotted the page, gathered up the whole manuscript, and took the barge to Amsterdam.

It was late in the month of July, in the year 1675, that Benedictus de Spinoza went to Amsterdam with the manuscript of the *Ethics* under his arm. And it was but a few weeks later that he returned home from Amsterdam—the manuscript still under his arm. For at the last moment he decided not to publish the book after all. Not for the time being at least. The reasons for this decision he stated in a letter written to Oldenburg in September:

> "While I was engaged on this matter [of arranging for the printing of the Ethics] a rumor was spread everywhere that a book of mine about God was in the press, and that in it I endeavored to show that there is no God. This rumor was believed by many. Therefore certain Theologians (perhaps the authors of this rumor) seized the opportunity of bringing complaints against me before the Prince and the Magistrates. Moreover the dull-witted Cartesians, because they are suspected of agreeing with me . . . continued (and even now continue) to denounce my opinions and writings

> everywhere. When I heard all this from certain trustworthy men, who also said that the Theologians were intriguing against me everywhere, I decided to postpone the publication I was preparing until I saw how matters turned out. . . . But daily the business seems worse to grow, and I am yet uncertain what to do."

And the business continued daily to grow worse. As early as June of that year the church council in The Hague had already uttered a premonitory growl against Spinoza's new book which, they had been informed, "was even more flagrant than the first." Soon other synods uttered threatening sounds. Had the pastors actually seen the *Ethics* they might have been less fearful of its publication. Though it was really far more radical a work than the *Treatise on Theology and Politics,* those pastors might never have discovered it. The bewilderingly close-knit reasoning of the book, and its terse, colorless speech, would probably have defeated them. The very opening sentence—"I understand that to be Cause of Itself whereof the essence involves existence and whereof the nature cannot be conceived unless existing"—that alone would have struck most of them dumb. But, not having seen the book, they imagined it to be the devastatingly heterodox document it really was—and they condemned it even before it could be printed. And Spinoza realized it would be sheer foolhardiness to flaunt them. Even if he did publish the book, there would remain the problem of how to distribute it. Save for his handful of secret disciples—several of whom had already copied out the manuscript of the *Ethics*—he feared that no one would be eager to circulate such a document in these times. Oldenburg had offered his aid, but with obvious lack of enthusiasm.

> "I shall not refuse to receive some copies," he had written in July. "But I would only ask that, when the time comes, you should address them to a certain Dutch merchant settled in London, who will then see to it that they are delivered to me. There will be no need to mention that such books have been forwarded to me. For, if only they come safely into my possession, I have no doubt it will be easy for me to distribute them among my friends here and there, and to obtain a fair price for them."

But Spinoza was not the sort of man to accept aid offered as reluctantly as that. He would rather let his work remain unpublished for the present. Of one thing he was utterly convinced: the *Ethics* contained the eternal truth. And with that in its favor, he saw no need to print it at once. Some day, he was sure, the world would be ready for it, and then it would not fail to light the path which free man must tread. It was not like the *Treatise on Theology and Politics,* a tract for the times. Its teachings were timeless. So it could wait.

In the interim he had other projects to occupy him. For one thing he wanted to revise the *Treatise on Theology and Politics,* for the hostility it had aroused among relatively enlightened critics had convinced him that he had not sufficiently clarified his point of view. Accordingly he wrote to Oldenburg and certain other men whose opinion he respected, asking them to state their specific objections to the book. He even promised them, lest they should fear for their reputations, that he would not mention their names in his refutation. And on the basis of their replies he began to jot down notes which he hoped to incorporate in a later edition of the work.

There were other ideas in his mind which he set out to execute now. His trade—which he was still practicing during part of each day—had led him to an interest in the phenomena of refraction and reflection, and he set out now to write a mathematical analysis of those phenomena entitled a *Treatise on the Rainbow.* It was not a very original piece of work—its dependence on Descartes was obvious throughout—and when, on its completion, he showed it to certain of his friends, they were apparently not greatly impressed with it. Such, at least, is Colerus's report.

> "I know, [he writes] some Men of great note in this Town (at The *Hague*) who have seen and read that Treatise; but they did not advise *Spinosa* to publish it: which perhaps gave him some trouble and made him resolve to burn it half a year before he died, as I have been informed by the people of the House where he lived."

On that last detail, however, Colerus was obviously misinformed. The manuscript was not destroyed but mislaid, and on its discovery ten years after Spinoza's death it was published as a separate work.

There was another little book which Spinoza began apparently during this period, this one a treatise on Hebrew Grammar. The task may have been suggested to him by certain students of theology who were numbered among his secret admirers. Ever since his own student days, when he had pored over Ibn Ezra's commentary, Spinoza had recognized the importance of grammar as a key to the interpretation of the Scriptures. And now he set out to write a manual on the subject.

He began, or at least talked of beginning, various other books now. Jarig Jelles in the preface to the *Posthumous Works* speaks of "an Algebra which he [Spinoza] proposed to write in a more concise and more intelligible manner, and also many other works, as various of his friends heard him say many times." And Colerus tells of "a Translation of the Old Testament into *Dutch*, about which he often discoursed with some Men learned in the Languages, and enquired into the Explications which the Christians give to several passages."

And while he worked on those projects he continued to correspond with his disciples and other acquaintances. And he was visited by many people, especially foreigners with libertarian ideas. As Bayle informs us, "free-thinkers flocked to him from all parts . . . [for] his life of retirement did not prevent the spread of his name and fame." Some were of the type we have already described—ragged radicals cast out of their own lands, and living by hook or crook here in exile. Others were less bohemian in character—indeed, many were men and women of rank and distinction. And to all alike the lens-grinder was unfailingly affable and sweet-tempered. Despite all that he had suffered in these last years, his "even and agreeable humor" had not left him. If he felt grieved because he was so persecuted, he showed no sign of it. Nor did he ever show any animosity toward those who were his persecutors. Indeed, he was far more patient with them than with certain of his well-wishers—as is evidenced by the reply he wrote late in 1675 to a young Catholic convert who sought to save his soul. This convert, a son of Conraad Burgh, the liberal-minded Treasurer-General of the United Netherlands, had once been a follower of Spinoza. But the young man had succumbed to the wave of reaction sweeping across Europe just then, and, much to the grief of his father, had entered the Roman Church. Moreover, with the zeal characteristic of a convert, he had set himself up as a propagandist for the Faith. He had even ventured to try to win over his former master, writing Spinoza a lengthy epistle which was as hackneyed in its argument as it was arrogant in its tone.

> "God is willing to snatch your soul from eternal damnation," he had assured the philosopher, "if only you are willing. Do not hesitate to obey the Lord, who has so often called you through others, and now calls you again, and perhaps for the last time, through me, who, having obtained this grace through the ineffable Mercy of God Himself, pray for the same for you." . . .

Spinoza had been reluctant at first to reply to so silly an harangue, feeling sure that the zealot "needed time rather than argument to be restored to his senses." And when he did finally bring himself to write an answer, he found it difficult to conceal his impatience. He took up the flimsy arguments presented by the young man, and demolished them with ill-restrained asperity. And he concluded by advising:

> "Away with this deadly superstition! Acknowledge the reason which God has given you, and cultivate it, if you would not be numbered among the brutes. Cease, I say, to call absurd errors mysteries, and do not shamefully confuse those things which are unknown to us, or as yet undiscovered, with those which are shown to be silly, as are the dreadful secrets of the Church . . . examine the history of the Church (of which I see you are most ignorant), and see how fraudulent are many of the Pontifical traditions . . . and come to your senses at last." . . .

But that outburst—incidentally one without parallel in Spinoza's correspondence—was directed at a fool, not a knave. Curiously, the philosopher seems to have been far more offended by the sight of stupidity than actual mendacity. Even when he learnt that he was being defamed by men whom he had always counted among his friends, even then he revealed no resentment. Lucas assures us there were many such wretches, "false friends who adored him to all appearances, yet who slandered him behind his back." And he tells how:

> "One day when he [Spinoza] heard that one of [his] greatest admirers tried to stir up the people and the Magis-

> trates against him, he replied without emotion: 'It is not from today that Truth costs dearly; but it will not be slander that will make me abandon her.' "

One of these false friends was none other than the famous philosopher Leibniz. He had corresponded with Spinoza for years, and in 1676 he visited him several times and conversed with him at great length. He got to read the manuscript of the *Ethics,* and later endeavored to purchase a copy of it from one of Spinoza's close friends. Yet even while Spinoza was still alive he spoke disparagingly of him to his enemies, and in later years he tried to deny that he had ever been intimate with the free-thinker. Actually, Leibniz was profoundly influenced by Spinoza's ideas, and revealed it in his own writings. Yet, being a vain, excessively ambitious, and essentially time-serving individual, he could never bring himself to confess his indebtedness.

There were others of that sort, some far more flagrant in their treachery. Yet Spinoza bore them no ill-will. He did not blame them. True to his own teachings, he counted their mendacity not their fault but their misfortune. He did not try to clear himself of the calumnies they uttered behind his back. He remained quietly in his attic and wrote.

Months passed, and still he saw no chance of publishing his *Ethics.* The fog of bigotry had not lifted. On the contrary, with the fortunes of war still going against the Dutch, the spirit of the people was more reactionary than ever before. The liberals were eager to come to terms with France; but the Prince of Orange, an obdurate man with an exalted opinion of his military prowess, was opposed to any negotiations. Spinoza, who saw how the young monarch was bringing ruin to the land, could not remain unmoved by the spectacle. He was far too weary—and too wise—to think of making protest. Instead, as became a philosopher, he decided to analyze the motives behind all that was going on. At the suggestions of some friend whose identity is no longer known, he set out to write a *Treatise on Politics.* His stated purpose in this essay was to show how "government can be so organized that it will escape tyranny, and be compatible with the peace and liberty of the citizens." But he had no thought of describing a Utopia. On the contrary, he was bent on being utterly realistic, regarding his fellowmen not as he might like them to be, but as they really are. He realized that

> "men are of necessity liable to passions, and so constituted as to pity those who are ill, and envy those who are well off; and that they are more prone to vengeance than to mercy. Moreover, every individual wishes the rest to live after his own mind, and to approve what he approves, and reject what he rejects."

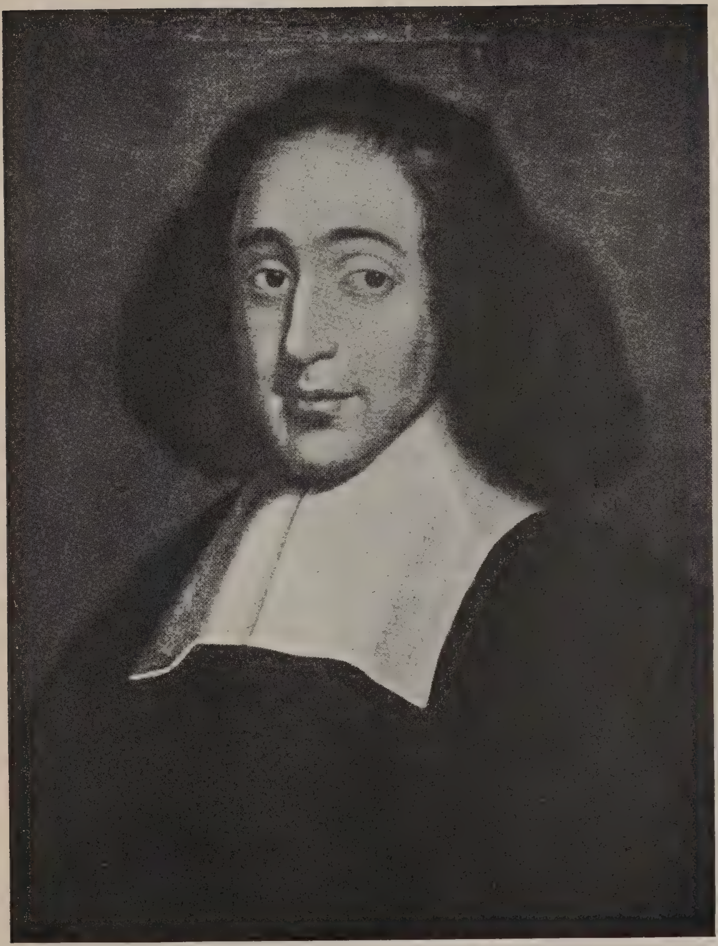
All this Spinoza understood full well, and he was therefore determined neither to "mock, lament, nor execrate human actions," but simply seek "to understand them with the same freedom of spirit as we generally use in mathematics."

Now as he saw it, human beings are not naturally moral. It is only because they are compelled by the exigencies of life to dwell together that they are reluctantly forced to acquire morality. "Men are not born for citizenship, but must be made fit for it." Naturally they believe in might, and only because they cannot live by that belief do they finally accept the idea of right. It is this that drives them to create a government, which is essentially the guarantor of right in return for the might which each individual surrenders to it.

But there are different forms of government, and it is necessary to see which can most effectively guarantee right—that is, a chance to live in peace and security—to its citizens. With that in mind the philosopher sought to describe the various forms. First he dealt with monarchy, and then with aristocracy. Finally he came to democracy——

But there he halted. He wrote three pages on democracy, and then put down his pen. He was too ill to go on. "To fight up against an abiding sickness," says De Quincey, "imposes a fiery combat." And that fiery combat, coupled with his other torments, had at last worsted the heretic. It was early in 1677, when Spinoza was still only in his forty-fifth year of life; but already for some time he had evidently been gravely declining. He actually mentioned that he was ill in one or two of his letters. A physician named George Hermann Schuller, one of his newer disciples, had been attending him of late. On the sixth of February this young man wrote to Leibniz: "I fear that Mr. Benedictus de Spinoza will be gone from us very soon, for the phthisis—an inherited disease in his family—seems to grow worse each day." Spinoza, too, must have known his end was near. True to his teachings, he did not grieve thereat. ("A free man," he had declared in the *Ethics*, "thinks of nothing less than death, and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life.") He had lived his life as he had wished to live it. He had done his work, and he was content. Now, sure that his life would soon be over, he calmly made ready for death.

He had already gone through his manuscripts, destroying such as he thought of no consequence. (Among those which he burnt there was that translation of the Pentateuch into Dutch, on which he apparently had been working desultorily for several years.) And, locking the rest in a desk, he left word that after his death the drawer be forwarded to Jan Rieuwertsz. There was but one instruction he sent with his papers, and that was that in publishing the *Ethics* his name should not appear on the book. He did not want his doctrine to be called after him: it was true and needed no signature. He was proud of the book—he knew it was his life-work—but he saw no reason to vaunt his pride. As he had written in that book: "He who desires to aid others either by word or deed so that they may enjoy the greatest good, he, I say, will not strive . . . to bring them to a state of wonderment so that his ideas may receive his name." He would not be one of those phi-



SPINOZA
from a portrait now in the library at Wolfenbüttel.

losophers spoken of by Cicero, "who write on the despising of glory, but affix their names to their books." It was enough for him that he had written the *Ethics;* the praise of posterity could not add to his joy.

He made no will, for, except for his manuscripts, he had very little to leave. Of the books he possessed—some hundred and twenty in all—he had already given the majority to Dr. Schuller to be distributed among the disciples and friends. Of other possessions all he had were a few finished lenses, the tools for polishing them, the bed which he had inherited from his father, four bed-sheets, two red curtains, a counterpane, a blanket, and the few clothes in his wardrobe. He hoped these belongings would bring enough when sold to pay for his burial, and perhaps the printing of the *Ethics.* So there was no need for him to draw up a will.

He did not complain even to the last. "Ever since he began to be in a languishing condition," says Colerus, "he always exprest in all his sufferings a truly *Stoical* constancy." The very day of his death the people of the house did not know how ill he was. He himself knew well, for he had already written to Dr. Schuller in Amsterdam to come to him if it was possible. But he apparently said nothing of this to the people around him. Mr. Van der Spyck later recalled that the day before the death, the twentieth of February, his lodger had actually come down from his attic to sit with him and smoke a pipeful of tobacco. It was on the Saturday before the last week of the "Carnaval," and the landlord and his wife had gone to church to hear the sermon regularly preached on that afternoon "to dispose every Body to receive the Communion which is administered the next day." When they returned at about four o'clock, Spinoza came downstairs and began "a pretty long conversation which did particularly run upon the Sermon." And then, having finished his pipe and talked himself out, the dying man "went to bed betimes."

Even the next morning before church Spinoza was able to go downstairs and chat a bit with the people of the house. Dr. Schuller had arrived by then, and, seeing the philosopher's condition, he at once ordered that "an old Cock" he boiled for lunch. And at noon, when the landlord returned with his wife, he brought up the food to the sick man and saw him take the broth and eat the meat "with a good Stomach." A little later the people of the house returned to church for the afternoon service leaving the physician with their lodger. "God willing, we shall resume our conversation after the sermon," they heard the philosopher call out to them as they left. But when they came back again he was already no more. He had died at three o'clock.

At once wild rumors began to fly about concerning the manner in which the terrible infidel had departed the world. Some said that he took some juice of mandrake at the last moment to escape the pangs of death. Others said that as he lay dying he groaned over and over again: "Oh God, have mercy on a miserable sinner." Still others said that to the very end he was unregenerate, ordering his landlady "to suffer no Minister to come to him, because he was willing to die peaceably and without disputing." But even Pastor Colerus, who might have been eager enough to believe at least one of those rumors, was convinced after careful inquiry "that all those Circumstances were meer Lies." As Kortholt reports, Spinoza "breathed his last breath peacefully . . . [though] whether such a death can fall to the lot of an Atheist, was recently the subject of discussion among learned men."

Four days later, the twenty-fifth of February, the body was laid to rest—attended, says Colerus, "by many Illustrious Persons, and followed by six Coaches."

It was only his body, however, that they buried. His manuscripts remained behind, to be sent on to Rieuwertsz, the printer, a few days later. Secretly they had to be sent on to him, the contents of the coffer unregistered with the carrier, lest it be impounded on reaching Amsterdam. And in those writings once so stealthily smuggled across the land, the glory of Spinoza endures. His body has long since returned to the dust whence it came; but his thoughts live on. And because they live on, he who was named Baruch, "Blesséd," by his father, is called blesséd by mankind to this day.

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